

FREEDOM STRUGGLE IN BURMA

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Introduction

The emergence of Asian nationalism as a potent political force in the twentieth century is a remarkable feature of the history of Asia. The growth of nationalism exercised a profound political influence on Southeast Asian countries and stirred them on to free themselves from the yoke of western domination. As a consequence of this development, the old chapter of western predominance came to an end, and a new era dawned in the history of Asia with the birth of several newly independent nations. Burma, being an important country of Southeast Asia, was bound to be affected in a definite way by the trend of events in Asia. The freedom struggle in Burma from 1942 to the end of 1947 constituted a crucial and critical period in her history. Burma's drive for independence and the outburst of impatient nationalism in the country during World War II and in post-war years ultimately led to the emergence of Burma as an independent and sovereign nation in the world community on 4 January, 1948.

The political development of Burma in the 1940's was a crucial one. Events moved very fast in Burma in this critical and hectic period for the independence of the country. Burma had undergone a sea change since the annexation of the country by the British in 1886. But, she remained in somewhat unsettled political situation prior to the First World War. The political awakening in the country manifested itself in the post-war period, especially in the 1920's. However, the constitutional measures advanced by the British failed to satisfy the growing

nationalist aspirations of the Burmese people. A series of events placed the political future of Burma to the forefront. The separation of Burma from India in 1937 was a step forward in this direction. The appearance of the Thakins on the political platform of Burma in the 1930's accelerated the growth of nationalism. The young Thakins clearly reflected the rising tide of Burmese nationalism.

The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 and Britain's involvement in it gave a new impetus to the freedom movement of Burma. The nationalist leaders in the country got an opportunity to fish in the troubled waters. But, all their efforts to exploit Britain proved futile. Nationalist's demand of dominion status for Burma was not conceded by the British even during Britain's darkest hours. However, most of the nationalist leaders of Burma still pursued the goal of independence. They proceeded in another way to realize their desired objective. The struggle for freedom in Burma entered into a new phase when the country came under the Japanese occupation by the middle of 1942. The British rule in Burma came to a sudden halt giving way to the Japanese Military Administration. It was really a turning point in the history of Burma. However the grant of nominal independence to Burma on 1 August, 1943 under the Japanese control fell far short of the long cherished desires of the nationalist leaders and the people for genuine independence. Burmese nationalism now became more evident. The real nature of Japanese control over Burma soon manifested itself. Most of the Burmese leaders became convinced that their hopes for independence were not to be realized under Japan. They realized the hollowness of the Japanese slogan of Asia for the Asiatics which really meant Asia for the Japanese. So they proceeded onwards through a new path in their search for real freedom. Disillusionment with Japan developed in the period of nominal independence giving rise to an anti-Japanese resistance movement in Burma. The Burmese rallied round the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), a broad-based political organization, which reflected a typical people's front. The AFPFL, under the

dynamic leadership of Aung San, co-operated with the Allies in driving out the Japanese from Burma. Burma's political future was now transformed as an event of world-importance.

The nationalist agitation took a decisive turn with the British reoccupation of Burma at the end of World War II. The AFPFL emerged as the most important voice in Burmese politics after the war. The period from May 1945 to the end of 1947 witnessed the growth of impatient nationalism in Burma for the gaining of independence from the British rule. Any form of alien rule was not acceptable to the nationalist leaders of Burma. However, the predominant status of the AFPFL was recognized by Mountbatten and other like minded British authorities. The British Military Administration in Burma during the period from June to early October, 1945 maintained cordial relations with the AFPFL and its leaders. But with the restoration of civil administration in Burma under Governor Dorman-Smith from the middle of October 1945, the divergence between the official and the Burmese nationalist points of view began to widen. The strained relations between Dorman-Smith and the AFPFL continued till August 1946. The conciliatory and co-operative attitude of the new Governor, Hubert Rance and the liberal outlook of the British Labour Government under Attlee not only secured the co-operation and goodwill of the nationalist leaders of Burma but paved the way of Burma's independence in more ways than one. A series of negotiations took place between Britain and Burma which ultimately resulted in complete independence of the country from British control. Great Britain bowed to the reality and recognized the independence of the country. The formal transfer of power to the Burmese was made on 4 January, 1948. Thus the events leading to the independence of Burma were of immense significance and of considerable interest. These mainly form the subject of the present study.

The importance of Burma's struggle for freedom from 1942 to 1947 may be generally accepted as a glorious phase of her independence movement. It is of special significance in

evaluating the real factors which helped to the independence of the country. The independence of Burma was achieved after a great many trials and tribulations. The country passed through phases in the process of attaining her freedom. The struggle to gain freedom from the British rule served to unite the people of Burma. They were brought together in a common effort to achieve the goal of independence. The unremitting struggle for Burmese independence claimed a large sacrifice in lives and treasure. But final negotiations between Britain and Burma were conducted in a spirit of goodwill and co-operation which largely accounted for a smooth transfer of power. The main importance of this study lies in the fact that it contributed towards shaping the destiny of Burma as an independent and sovereign nation.

This study has a number of useful purposes to serve. Our chief purpose is to trace the course of developments in Burma during the Second World War and the post-war period which eventually culminated in the independence of the country. This period of rapid political developments has not been adequately assessed and hence needs special attention. Of late, the availability of important Japanese and British sources has made this task easier than what it was a decade ago. The purpose of this study is therefore to examine in detail the growth of revolutionary and impatient nationalism in Burma between the years 1942-1947.

In the present study I have endeavoured to review Japanese and British attitudes to the nationalists' demand for independence of Burma. An effort has also been made in it to assess the role of the Burmese nationalists to realize the aim of independence under Japanese rule and their efforts to organize an anti-Japanese resistance movement when their hopes for real independence appeared to be unattainable under Japan. Subsequently, the nationalists' vigorous drive for independence in the post-war period has also been described in detail with a view to bring out the real nature of the struggle for freedom in Burma.

An accurate study of the freedom struggle in Burma during 1942-1947 can tell us a lot about the strong determination of the people of a small country to free themselves from foreign domination. It was during this period that impatient nationalism became the catalyst for uniting the people of Burma and spurring them to political action. Thus, this study will highlight many of the obscure and relevant factors which led to Burma's independence.

This study is essentially focussed on the political aspect of the freedom struggle in Burma from 1942 to 1947. The emphasis throughout is, therefore, on the political issues which the nationalists considered as important in their aims and designs for independence. How far the Burmese demand for independence was conditioned by their wartime Japanese and post-war British masters? How far it fell short of nationalists' demand for complete independence? Why initially the British were hesitant to grant independence to Burma after the end of the war, and what brought about a change in their attitude leading to the recognition of Burma's independence? These are some of the important questions which are basically concerned with this study. An attempt has been made in the present study to find suitable answers to these questions. The study lays particular emphasis on the factors and personalities involved in the freedom struggle of Burma.

This study deals with the period 1942-1947. The selection of the period is based mainly on the consideration of a crucial and critical phase in Burma's struggle for independence. The choice of 1942 has been made primarily because the year brought about a noteworthy change in the struggle for freedom in Burma. It was this year in which Japan entered into Burma and occupied the country driving out the British. The year marked the beginning of a new phase of nationalist development. The choice of the year 1947 is mainly due to the reason that the freedom struggle in Burma came to a glorious end with the achievement of independence by the end of the year. Only a formal declaration of the independence of Burma was to be made on 4 January, 1948.

There are only a few studies on the freedom struggle in Burma from 1942 to 1947. John F. Cady's *A History of Modern Burma*, (Ithaca, New York), published over two decades ago in 1958, is still the only standard work which especially gives a good description of the period of colonial rule and also traces the course of national movement in the twentieth century. Some attempts have been made in recent years to study the course of freedom struggle in a general historical framework by some Burmese, western, and Indian scholars. Albert D. Moscott's *British Policy and the Nationalist Movement in Burma, 1917-1937* (Honolulu, 1974), gives an account of the colonial rule in Burma after First World War. An unpublished thesis for Ph.D. submitted to the Magadh University, Bodh-Gaya by S P. Singh deals with the growth of nationalism in Burma. But all these attempts to trace the course of national movement have been confined to the period before the outbreak of the Second World War in the Southeast Asian region. It is mainly because research in post-war Burmese history has been seriously affected as the flow of British governmental documents stopped suddenly at the end of 1941. No attention could be paid so far to study in a detailed and more thorough way the freedom struggle in Burma in the period 1942-1947. Fortunately the task has become easier now with the publication of certain valuable Japanese source materials of the Second World War period and the English and Burmese sources for the post-war period.

This study is mainly based on certain valuable documents, government publications, important Papers, the archival materials, speeches and writings of the nationalist leaders, biographies, autobiographies, and memoirs of the leading nationalist leaders, and a number of other sources. With regard to the period—Burma under Japanese rule, main reliance has been placed on Frank N. Trager's recently edited *Burma: Japanese Military Administration: Selected Documents, 1941-1945* (Philadelphia, 1971). It contains fifty valuable documents which throw ample light on all important aspects of Japanese rule in Burma. Next in importance is Ba Maw's *Breakthrough in Burma: Memoirs of a Revolution, 1939-1946* (New Haven,

1968). Though somewhat biased, it gives a detailed description of the period before 1945. The Report of Vice-Admiral Mountbatten has also been of much use. A number of relevant files available in National Archives of India also throw new light on this period.

With regard to the post-war period mention must be made of the 'Attlee Papers' which serves a useful purpose by giving some account of the post-war Burmese drive for independence. Some important publications of the Government of Burma have also been made use of. The writings and speeches of some important Burmese leaders have been consulted. The biographies and autobiographies of some important leaders like Aung San, U Nu etc. are also important. Among other sources, the important Burmese periodical publications like *Burma*, *The Guardian* etc. are worth-mentioning.

The present work consists of seven chapters. The first two chapters serve as background to the actual theme of the study. While the first chapter deals with the land, the people, and Burma under British rule, the second is concerned with the growth of nationalism before the Japanese conquest of Burma. It provides a useful basis for a clear understanding of the freedom struggle.

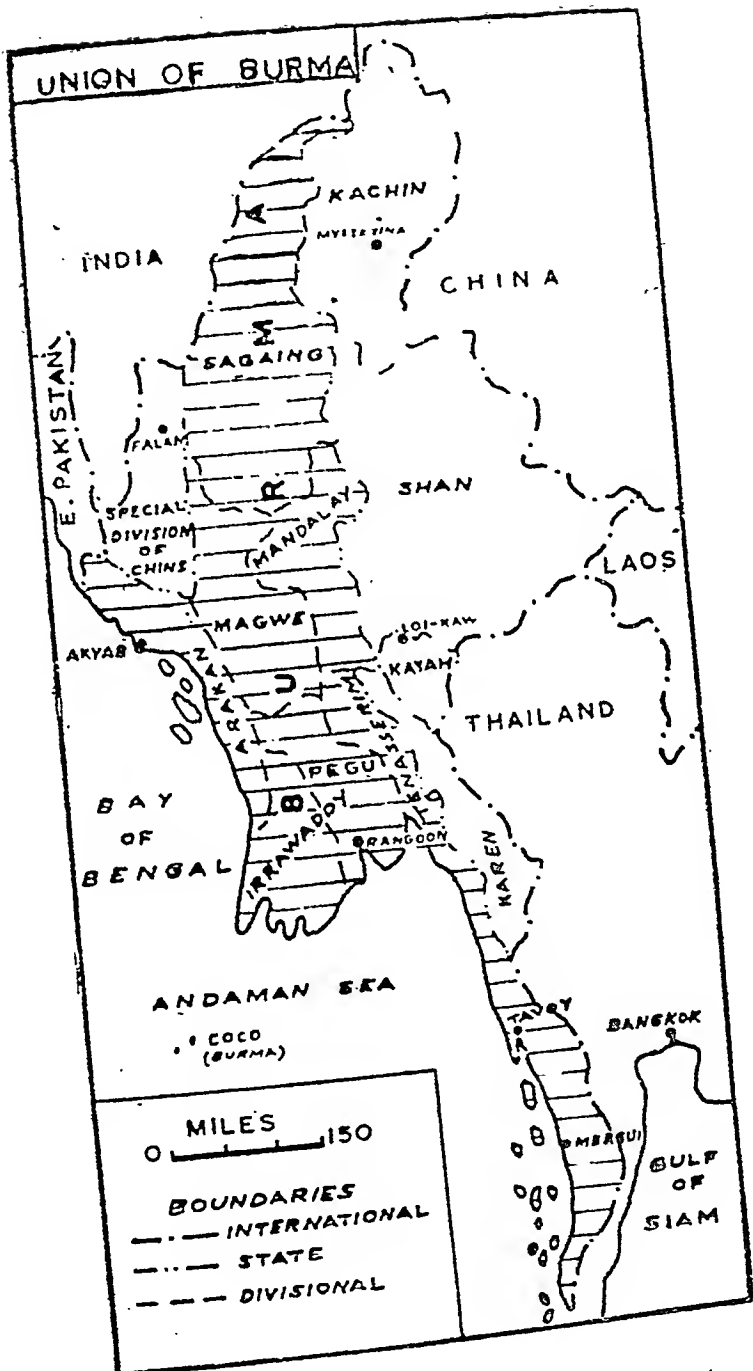
The third chapter gives a picture of Burma under Japanese control. It describes the main aspects of Japanese rule and grant of nominal independence to Burma. It also depicts the role of the Thakins under the Japanese. Chapter four analyses the gradual disillusionment with Japan and the rise of an anti-Japanese resistance movement in Burma. It also discusses the role of the AFPFL under the leadership of Aung San, and their co-operation with the Allies in expelling the Japanese out of Burma by May 1945.

The fifth chapter is related to the study of the British reoccupation of Burma and establishment of Military Administration in the country from June to September 1945. It also describes conflict and confrontation between the British and

the Burmans from October 1945 till August 1946. Chapter six discusses conciliation and co-operation between the British and Burmans from September 1946 till the end of 1947 when the steps towards ultimate transfer of power were taken by the British in co-operation with Burmese nationalists. It is also devoted to a description of sending of delegations from Rangoon to London, signing of treaties and agreements, the convention of the AFPFL, adoption of the new constitution by the Constituent Assembly, and finally the passing of the Burma Independence Act by the British Parliament in December 1947.

The seventh and last chapter is a brief conclusion of various facts mentioned in the preceding chapters. It presents a short analysis of the role played by leading political leaders and the AFPFL in bringing about the independence of the country. It also examines the main circumstances and factors which influenced the freedom struggle.

Two maps have also been provided in the present work: the first in chapter one shows Burma's political divisions after independence, and the second in chapter three indicates important places in Burma during the Japanese occupation.



The Background

The Land

Burma is an important country of South-East Asia both geographically and strategically. It can conveniently be divided into two distinct parts—the lowlands (plains and delta) and the mountains. Valleys, mountains, and rivers are dominant in the country. A valley, about 600 miles long and 100 miles broad, forms the main part of Burma. It is encircled on three sides by mountains. There also exists a varied coastline of some 1200 miles long. In the south, the Irrawaddy, Pegu, and Sittang rivers flow out. The northern part of the low land is regarded as the dry zone whereas the southern part known as the delta region is referred to as Burma's rice-bowl. Arakan and Tenasserim are the two outlying areas, politically forming parts of Burma. Arakan, a narrow coastal strip, to the west, lies between the mountains and the Bay of Bengal. To the south-east, another narrow coastal strip, Tenasserim, is between the Andaman Sea and the mountains that separate Burma from Thailand. Burma remains partially isolated from her land neighbours as the mountains prove to be a major obstacle.

Burma is a large country with a comparatively small population. Of all the states of main land South-East Asia,

Burma is the largest country with an area of 261,760 square miles. But it is underpopulated. Its average density of population is lower than most of the other states of South-East Asia.¹

Burma has India as its neighbour to the west and China to the north-east. Other neighbouring countries are Bangladesh on the west, Laos in the east, and Thailand to the south-east. Burma is situated between longitude 92° and 102° east of Greenwich, and between latitude 10° and 29° north.² Mostly there are two, the wet and the dry, seasons in Burma. Burma consists of parallel river valleys and mountain ranges running from north to south. The north-eastern and eastern borders are marked by rugged ranges, high to the north and lower behind the Tenasserim coast. For long, rivers have been main means of economic and cultural developments of Burma, particularly the Irrawaddy and the Chindwin rivers. But the Salween is the longest river in Burma (1750 miles). The most important means of transport in Burma has always been inland waterways.

Burma is a potentially rich country. Before the British annexation, the economy of Burma was primarily an agricultural subsistence economy. Burma produced sufficient rice and other foodstuffs for her own requirements at that time and virtually there were no exports or imports. But after Burma became a part of the British empire, significant changes were brought about in the economy of the country. The great potentialities of the delta as a rice-exporting region were realized. British merchants looked to the Irrawaddy delta, as their principal source of rice. After 1869, rice became the chief export of Lower Burma. The demand for Burmese rice began to rise in India and later on in Europe. Burma eventually became the largest exporter of rice during the British rule. The export of cleaned rice increased from 520,000 tons in 1881 to

1. Charles A. Fisher, *South East Asia: A Social Economic and Political Geography*, London, 1964, p. 400

2. F.S.V. Donnison, *Burma*, London, 1970, p. 20.

3,500,000 tons in 1941.³ But there was a sharp decline in rice export after 1941 due to prolonged disorders in Burma from 1941 to 1949. The value of rice export rose from Rs. 30 million in 1869 to Rs. 159 million in 1900, Rs. 389 million in 1913-14, and Rs. 659 million in 1926-27.⁴ Burma regained her former status as largest exporter of rice in the world by the year 1954.

Burma is actually very rich in mineral and other resources. Burma's important natural resources and products of export include mineral oil, petroleum, teak and rubber etc. Burma has more fertile land per head of population than most other countries in Asia. Despite its many favourable natural resources, Burma however is an economically underdeveloped nation. "Burma cannot supply its needs for textiles and other products of light industry. Most of the needed machinery and equipment, textiles, dairy-products, chemicals, and iron and steel had to be imported from abroad."⁵ The 1953 Census provides some important features of Burma's economy. The six major industries in Burma were food and beverages, tobacco, textiles, footwear, wood products, and chemicals. Together they comprised 88 per cent of the country's business.⁶ The centre of industrialization was concentrated in Rangoon, Insein, and Kamayut. Rangoon, the capital of Burma, dominates urban life like other South-East Asian capitals. It had long been the main part of the country. More than 85 per cent of Burma's foreign trade passes through this port. The city of Rangoon stands at the confluence of the Pegu and Hlaing rivers, about 26 miles from the sea. Under British regime, Rangoon turned to be one of the most efficient ports in Asia. Unlike other ports of Burma, it could be used throughout the whole year.

3. Fisher, *op. cit.*, p.436.

4. Donnison, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

5. Alice Taylor ed., *South-East Asia*, Great Britain, 1972, p. 65

6. George McTurnan Kabin ed., *Governments and Politics of Southeast Asia*, New York, 1959, p. 98.

The People

Burma is one of the least crowded countries of South-East Asia. No complete census of Burma has been taken since 1931. Yet the population of Burma in 1972 was estimated to be 28,874,000.⁷ The rate of growth in population of Burma has been moderate. The people of Burma may be classified into two categories on the basis of their origin, that is, indigenous and alien. Within the indigenous group are the Burmans, Arakanese, Karens, Shans, Mons, Kachins, Chins and many smaller ethnic-linguistic groups. Indigenous peoples may be classified culturally as a hill or a plains type. The Kachins, Chins, and hill Karens are identified with "hill culture". The Burmans, Mons, Shans, Arakanese, and delta Karens generally fit into the category of "plains culture". Among the alien minority groups in Burma, the Indians, Chinese, Europeans, and Japanese are important.

There were three important waves of migrations in Burma. The first was the Tibeto-Burman races who entered Burma from the north. The second wave was of the Mon-Khmer races who settled in Lower Burma. The third and last wave was of the Tai-Chinese peoples who moved into Burma from the north-east. During the early history of Burma, the majority of migrants came from the north. But the main cultural penetration into Burma came through India from the west. Spencer says that "in a general way the lowlands have been the final goal of all the varied culture groups that have entered Burma, and the modern Burmese people and Burmese culture have been the final product. The Burmese of today are a lowland people, and their culture is a lowland culture, though the upland frame is home to a wide variety of culture groups with different patterns of culture."⁸

7. C.A. Fisher, "Burma: Physical and Social Geography" in *South-East Asia: An Introduction*, Europa Publications Ltd., London, 1973, p. 20.
8. J.E. Spencer, *Asia East by South: A Cultural Geography*, New York, 1954, p. 208.

The Karens form the largest of the indigenous groups. They constitute eleven per cent of the total population. The southern Shan upland and the Irrawaddy Delta have mostly been their homeland. The Shans comprise about $8\frac{1}{2}$ per cent of the population. They have settled largely in their own state, but have spread into the Irrawaddy and Chindwin valleys also. The Kachins form about three per cent of the entire population. The Burmans number about 70 per cent of the population and have occupied the lowlands.⁹ The minority races are generally to be found in mountains surrounding the Burma plain.

Of non-indigenous peoples, Indians and Chinese are the most important. The existence of these two alien minority peoples in Burma can be traced to the earliest times. Both played a significant role in the commercial and financial life of the country. During the tenure of the British rule, a good number of Indians entered Burma. In 1970, the total strength of Indian population in Burma was estimated to be around 450,000. The Indian immigrants during British rule concentrated in the Irrawaddy Delta region and Rangoon. There was an influx of Indian moneylenders, agricultural and other labour in Burma. But it was only in the economic field that the main Indian penetration took place. Indians had established a virtual monopoly in many of the public services in Burma like the accounts, medical, engineering, and the Posts and Telegraphs Department. But the majority of Indians were the ordinary workers, employed in the fields, docks, railways and mines, and for the most part domiciled in Burma for periods of not more than two or three years.¹⁰ Burma was exploited financially and economically in various ways like the Chettyar money-lenders. The entry of Indian immigrants into Burma was, however, formally checked only after 1937. Indians played almost the same role in Burma as that of the Chinese in most other parts of South-East Asia.

9. Donnison, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

10. Fisher, *South-East Asia: A Social Economic and Political Geography*, p. 439.

Another important non-indigenous peoples who influxed into Burma, were Chinese. Like Indians, they entered Burma mainly by sea during the British rule. They numbered some 194,000 in 1931.¹¹ In 1948, the overseas Chinese in Burma formed 1½ per cent of the total population. Their number was 350,000 in 1958 which went on increasing in proportion to diminishing number of Indians, especially during the sixties and early seventies. The Chinese were engaged primarily in trading in Rangoon and other inland towns. Unrecorded movement across the north-eastern borders also accounted for the growing number of Chinese in Burma. As a result, while the number of Indians in Burma has considerably decreased, that of the Chinese has increased since 1941. The Chinese appeared less alien and unpopular in Burma than Indians. Inter-marriage between Chinese and Burmese was not very uncommon.

Thus, although administratively forming part of India till 1937, Burma was quite distinct in social, economic, and physical spheres. It identified itself more with South-East Asia than with the Indian sub-continent. Even the average standard of living in Burma was higher than in India.

The urban Census of 1953 provides a good deal of data about the city dwellers of Burma. About one seventh of Burma's people lived in cities and towns. Forty-five per cent of these were crowded into five cities : Rangoon, Mandalay, Moulmein, Bassein, and Henzada.¹² A quasi-federal constitution was adopted in September, 1947, under which the Union was made of six constituent units, namely Burma proper, the Shan State, the Kachin State, the Karenni State (now Kayah State), the Kawthulay Special Region (now Karen State) and the special Division of the Chins.¹³

11. *Ibid.*

12. Kabin, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

13. W.G. East and O.H.K. Spate eds. *The Changing Map of Asia*, London, 1961, 4th edition, p. 291.

Buddhism is a very real part of the life of the Burmese. More than 85 per cent of the population are Buddhist by religion. The history of Buddhism in Burma is closely inter-linked with the development of Burmese culture and civilization. It has served as an unifying force in the history of Burma. The Constitution of 1947 established this religion as the religion of the great majority of citizens. Besides Buddhism, about 9 per cent of the Burmese population are of Muslim or Hindu faith and nearly 3 per cent are Christians.

Burmese is the official language and mothertongue of per cent of the indigenous races of Burma. The use of English has also been permitted and is widely used in Rangoon. Even it has been the medium of instruction at university stage. But the Government of the Union of Burma had gradually to discourage the use of English. The Burmese language is closer to Chinese than to any of the Indian languages. Other main languages spoken among the indigenous races are Shan, Karen, Kachin, and several forms of Chin.

The Burmese are like Mongolians in their physical features. The national dress for both sexes in Burma is known as longyi. The Burmese are strongly individualistic. They are not naturally warlike. The Burmese are a people without class or class distinction. There was no aristocracy or middle class in Burma before the British annexation. Actually stratification by social class is more nearly absent in Burma than in almost any other country.

Different races of Burma have played an important part in the past towards the development of Burmese civilization. The Burmans were, however, already the leading people well before the introduction of British rule.

Burma Under British Rule

From an independent State, Burma became part of the British Empire by right of conquest and until the beginning of 1942, she remained under British rule for so many decades.

Burma became a part of the British Indian Empire in three Anglo-Burmese Wars of 1824-26, 1852 and 1885-86. There wars were launched from India, with Indian forces under British command. Burmese incursions into the border areas alarmed the British to safeguard their Indian Empire and north eastern frontier. The Company's government in India was prepared to take up the challenge. The two expanding empires were bound to clash with each other which would inevitably result in war. "During January-February 1824, Burmese troops under Maha Bandula entered Cachar, and actual conflict broke out between Burmese and British troops."¹⁴ As a result of the First Burmese War in 1824, Burma surrendered her coastal provinces of Arakan and Tenasserim to the British. She also agreed to enter into commercial treaty arrangements with the English Company. A British Resident was to remain at the Burmese capital of Ava. "Thus by 1826 the English East India Company's interests were well committed in South-East Asia, but no where more deeply than in Burma, mainly as a result of that country's proximity to India."¹⁵ Burma was hardly given any opportunity by the British after 1826 to regain her self-confidence. "The year 1826 marked the conclusion of the first stage in Burma's subjection to Western rule."¹⁶ The whole of Lower Burma, including the Burmese provinces of Pegu and Martaban, was annexed to the British Empire after the Second Burmese War of 1852. "After the second war the kingdom was shut in and weakened, its sea ports, the fertile valleys and the Delta occupied. Burmese missions went to Europe to search for allies and aid for building a strong modern nation. But it was too late. The British, having taken half of the country, must take the whole, for the doctrine was that half-measures in colonial ventures were dangerous."¹⁷ The whole of Burma's coastline was brought under British control by 1855. "Pegu, with its port of Rangoon, was the real heart of British Burma,

14. W.S. Desai, *A Pageant of Burmese History*, Bombay, 1961, p. 127.

15. Brian Harrison, *South-East Asia—A Short History*, London, 1955, p. 179.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Maung Maung, *Burma and General Ne Win*, Bombay, 1969, p. 1.

and there the effects of western rule were beginning to be most clearly shown."¹⁸ The Third and last Anglo-Burmese War of 1885-86 resulted in the British annexation of the whole of the Kingdom of Burma. In 1886 the Burmese Government surrendered. King Thibaw was deposed and the monarchy in Burma was abolished. The whole of Burma now became a part of the British-Indian system. "The impact of the outside world thus proved to be too formidable for traditionalist and land-locked Burma to withstand."¹⁹ Burma now became a new province of India and it was administered directly from India until 1897.²⁰

The British administrative structure in Burma was based largely on Indian model. Even the government relied upon the services of Indian officials, clerks, engineers and doctors. As Hall rightly observes: "Britain's greatest mistake in dealing with Burma was to attach the country to the Indian empire. It was the natural thing to do, seeing that each stage of the conquest was organized and carried out by the Government of India. But its inevitable result was the standardization of Burma's administration according to the Indian model."²⁰

The British annexation of Burma in 1886 was followed by a period of pacification. Although the annexation was easy and smooth, the pacification of the country was difficult, slow and costly. It took about ten years to pacify Burma. In course of time peace was resored and a stable government established. This was achieved through the use of force as well as firmness and competence of officers of the new government. Sir Charles Crosthwaite took over as Commissioner in 1889 and reorganized the administrative machinery of Burma. "There followed a period during which order was better maintained than at any other time in the history of Burma, before or after. It became

18. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

19. John F. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, Ithaca, New York, 1958, p. 68.

20. D.G.E. Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, New York, 1968, 3rd edition, p. 730.

possible to travel freely and with little danger throughout the country. The government was incomparably more authoritative and effective than any other that Burma has ever known."²¹ The British administration in Burma maintained in general a policy of laissez-faire with regard to economic and social developments. It maintained the rule of law. But the traditional Burmese ways of life and labour in the villages remained undisturbed by the new administration. Indeed, the new government was able to command loyalty from its Burmese officers. But in fact it was a foreign government. The real power in Burma was enjoyed by British officers who held all higher appointments in the government. "Originally, and in essence, the system was direct administration built round the hierarchy of the Chief Commissioner, the Commissioners, and the Deputy Commissioners, each responsible within their charges—the province, the divisions, and the districts—for all aspects of government. This bare framework was soon expanded and modified, but its essential principle of centralized responsibility survived."²²

A series of constitutional developments took place in British Burma. There existed three commissionerships of Arakan, Tenasserim, and Pegu in British Burma in 1852. They were independent of each other, but all under the control of the Government in India. In 1862 the three British Commissionerships were constituted into a single province of British Burma. It was placed under a Chief Commissioner with headquarters at Rangoon. In 1872 a Judicial Commissioner was appointed who relieved the Chief Commissioner of his judicial functions. After the British annexation of Upper and Central Burma in 1886, the entire country came to be known as the Province of Burma. It was put under a Chief Commissioner responsible to the Governor-General. In 1897, the Chief Commissioner was elevated to the rank of Lieutenant-Governor. In 1923, the status of Burma was further enhanced and she was placed under a Governorship. In 1937, Burma was separated from

21. Dennison, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

22. *Ibid.*

India, and the Governor became directly responsible to the Government of the United Kingdom.²³

The British took special measures to organize village administration in Burma. The villages themselves were left to run their own affairs as social and economic units. Under British rule, every village constituted an administrative unit directly subject to government regulations for the maintenance of order and the collection of revenue. The powers and duties of the village headmen were clearly specified. A simple system of municipal government was applied in bigger towns of Upper Burma. But the principle of self-government was not adopted. "Representative Government had its beginning in the municipal committees first set up in 1874; but yet until 1922 the regime was almost entirely official and autocratic."²⁴ After 1897, legislative autonomy was granted to Burma. The Lieutenant-Governor was furnished with a Legislative Council consisting of nine nominated members, four officials and five non-officials. "For the first time since the application of the British administrative system to Burma it was possible to enact legislation for Burma in Burma... There were no elected members at all, and its powers were strictly circumscribed."²⁵ The Council did not perform any parliamentary function. It was actually meant for making laws and rendering advice. After 1909 the size of the Legislative Council was increased from nine to seventeen members. But only two of them were elected, one chosen by the Burma Chamber of Commerce (an European body) and the other by the Rangoon Trades Association. In 1915, the number of the Council members was further enlarged to thirty, but only two members were to be elected. Every action of the Council was subject to the successive vetoes of the Governor, the Viceroy in India, and the Secretary of State for India in London. So "the Legislative Council remained exclusively a vehicle for British official and mercantile opinion, while throughout the country districts the administration was directed

23. Desai, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

24. Hugh Tinker, *The Union of Burma*, London, 1967, p. 1.

25. Donnison, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

by British officials, who ruled their charges with a paternal authority."²⁶ Thus the people of Burma became simply British subjects with almost the same status as the people in provinces of British India.

Under British rule, it was quite natural that the British made no serious efforts to develop anything like a national economy in Burma. It was not in their economic and political interests. "Thus, merely by the working of economic forces, there came into existence a plural society, comprising many different racial elements, differing in culture and performing different economic functions and with nothing in common but the desire for gain. What had formerly been a national society was converted into a business concern."²⁷ Prior to 1850, the attention of the British in Burma was practically confined to the export trade in rice. Till the end of the nineteenth century, British economic policy in Burma was mainly commercial. It was not yet concerned with the exploitation of natural resources. Agriculture and some industries were developed in Burma under British rule. "The period from the annexation of Upper Burma in 1886 to World War I witnessed the high tide of British commercial and agricultural expansion in Burma and the fashioning of an administrative policy and programme to serve growing economic needs. It was a period of seeming tacit recognition by Burmans generally of the advantages inherent in stable government and in the country's vigorously expanding economy."²⁸ However, economic discontent in Lower Burma grew intensely after the First World War and particularly after the economic crisis of 1930. "The outstanding feature in the history of Burma under British authority has been the rapidity with which she has been drawn into the whirlpool of world markets. Eighty-five years ago Lower Burma was a very sparsely populated region, covered with swamps and forests. Early in the 20th century it became one of the

26 Tinker, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

27. J.S. Furnivall, *South Asia in World Today*, Chicago, 1950, p. 4.

28. W.S. Desai, *India and Burma: A Study*, Calcutta, 1954, pp. 125-26.

principal rice-exporting areas of the world."²⁹ Lower Burma eventually became the heart of Burma. "The economic gains realized during the first two decades of British rule were impressively gratifying."³⁰

The economic developments in Burma under British rule were sponsored or controlled by Europeans, Indians, and Chinese. Burma was an agricultural country. But she depended for her agricultural development upon Indian and British capital, and largely on Indian labour. Economically, Burma was more a colony of India rather than that of Britain. The inclusion of Burma within the British Empire resulted in an influx of Indian moneylenders and Indian agricultural and other labour. Indians also dominated in commercial life as merchants and retailers. They even controlled most of Burma's foreign trade. The traditional Indian money-lenders, the Chettiyars, found Burma a land of great opportunity and made much profit. It eventually added to the economic discontent in Burma.

Indians came to Burma not only as workers, labourers, and merchants, but they took positions in the British administration as well. It amounted to closing the doors to employment opportunities and loss of control over much of the rich delta rice lands for the Burmese and many non-Burmese. Indian immigrants aroused hostility in other ways as well. Alien shopkeepers, who encouraged buying on credit and thereby became money-lenders themselves; trained personnel from India, who monopolized so many jobs in the modern sectors of the economy and in the bureaucracy; and unskilled immigrants, competed with the Burmese proletariat for pitiful wages, all came to be seen as instruments of colonial exploitation.³¹ An anti-Indian feeling began to develop in Burma. It gave birth

29. W.S. Desai, *A Pageant of Burmese History*, pp. 248-49.

30. J.F. Cady, *South East Asia: Its Historical Development*, New Delhi, T.M.H. Edition, 1976, p. 386.

31. Lea E. Williams, *South East Asia: A History*, New York, 1976, p. 153.

to communal disharmony and in 1930 there broke out violent anti-Indian riots in Rangoon in which 120 Indians were done to death. After the separation of Burma from India in 1937, Indian immigration was restricted and the dominance of Indians and Burmese economy decreased. "The result of British policy and of the Indian influx was to create barriers, social, political and economic, between the British rulers and their subjects, the Burmese majority and the indigenous minorities."³²

Burmese culture diminished under British rule in various ways. Buddhism was an established religion in Burma professed by a vast majority of the people. The status of the Buddhist monks was greatly undermined in Burma under British rule. Though the British had not intended to interfere with Buddhism, official recognition to the Buddhist ecclesiastical code was not granted. Discipline in the monastic order also deteriorated. But "Buddhism became a convenient rallying point of the nation. Under alien rule of people drew closer and more jealously to their religion. . . . Such a religion may not help to fan the glowing embers of nationalism into leaping flames. But the religion provided a forum where People could meet and think together."³³ The decline in monastic discipline posed a serious problem for the first time at the end of the First World War. A younger generation of politically-minded monks came to the forefront and an agitation against British rule began in 1921 under the leadership of U Ottama. The establishment of the Sangha Sametggi in 1922 was an evident result of nationalism in monastic order. It aimed at promoting religion and education on national level. Its members were widespread throughout Burma advocating non-cooperation, non-payment to taxes and the policy of boycott.³⁴

The traditional Buddhist monastic education in Burma found no place in the new educational system under British

32. William C. Johnstone, *Burma's Foreign Policy: A Study in Neutrality*, Cambridge, 1963, p. 9.

33. Maung Maung, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

34. Hall, *op. cit.*; p. 734.

rule. English became the language of law courts and the government. The British Government in Burma was primarily concerned with the establishment and development of mixed schools and of purely English schools. In 1923, a university was established at Rangoon for training administrators, teachers, doctors and engineers. The British aimed at a liberal education in Burma and provided facilities for it. But there was a boycott of government and missionary educational institutions throughout Burma. "An attempt was made by a Council of National Education to create a complete educational system free from government control. National education was to be the key to unlock the door to national independence and self-government."³⁵

Under British rule, a close social contact between the British and the Burmans could not be established. The two races differed completely in social customs, interests, education, language etc. Burmese, being a difficult language, created a social barrier between the ruler and the ruled. The great majority of Burmans had no knowledge of English.³⁶ The new economic forces operating in Burma under British rule produced social disintegration and destroyed family and village ties. Even rural community life was adversely affected. The British never aimed at national unity in Burma. The traditional society in Burma was shattered giving rise to a plural society. The British encouraged sectional factionalism in Burmese society. Burma proper was separated from the frontier peoples. Even the frontier peoples were divided among themselves by putting them under their own local chieftains.³⁷ In the first quarter of the twentieth century, the British stimulated group characteristics and group identity among the non-Burmese groups. In Burmese society unity was discouraged and individualism was encouraged. "Burmese were not permitted to extend their cultural domination over the non-Burmese inhabitants in any

35. *Ibid.*, p. 737.

36. Donnison, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-94.

37. J.S. Farnivall, *The Governance of Modern Burma*, New York, 1958, p. 22.

way that might have resulted in developing common ties and interests among all the people of the country."³⁸ It substantially restricted the growth of nationalism and the expression of nationalist feelings. The indigenous social character of Burma was completely disrupted under British rule. Burma was a very disorganized country of the world before 1914 as a result of increasing social deterioration.³⁹

Thus Burma experienced several notable political, economic, cultural, and social changes during British rule. The face of Burma was drastically changed under the British from what it was under the monarchy. A systematized administration was established in Burma by the British. Burma was provided with a modern state machinery. The conception of an independent judiciary was introduced. Burma was accorded various forms of representative institutions immediately before the First World War.⁴⁰ The Burmans learnt from the British the idea of appreciating their past. Some attempts were made to revive the Burmese Buddhist culture towards the end of the nineteenth and at the start of the twentieth century. A British official J.S. Furnivall played an important role in the formation of the Burma Research Society, which was concerned with various aspects of the cultural history of Burma. But it cannot be denied that the British administration in Burma was highly impersonal. The British exploited the resources of Burma. The British rule aroused a feeling of inferiority complex among the Burmans. The new generation of Burmans showed their unwillingness towards the social and economic development. To sum up, the unfamiliar British administration, cultural decline, a growing sense of national humiliation, and nationalist resentment against foreign rule all accounted for the emergence of nationalism in Burma.

38. Johnstone, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

39. J.F. Cady, *South East Asia: Its Historical Development*, pp. 380-381.

40. J.S. Furnivall, *The Governance of Modern Burma*, pp. 21-22.

The Growth of Nationalism in Burma Before the Japanese Conquest

The emergence of nationalism is an important episode in the history of Burma.¹ The growth of nationalism paved the way of independence movement in Burma. The nationalism of Burma was a product of various modern forces which operated from different directions. Burma's connection with the British, the new education, world forces and contact with India were some of the important influences which brought about the national awakening in Burma. Japan's victory over Russia in 1905 aroused the Burmese national sentiment. But it was only after the First World War that nationalism became a powerful political force in Burma. Burmese nationalism now entered into a new life.

Nationalism was, however, not a new thing in Burma. Consciousness of nationhood, religion, language, and love of the country bound the people of Burma prior to the advent

1. For a detailed treatment of the subject before the Second World War see Albert D. Moscotti *British Policy and the Nationalist Movement in Burma, 1917-1937*, Hawaii, 1974; S.P. Singh, "Growth of Nationalism in Burma: 1900-1940" PH. D. Thesis Magadh University, 1976,

of British in Burma. A number of factors attributed to the growth of nationalism in Burma during British rule. But the idea of freedom from British rule failed to unite the people of Burma as a whole. It did not even generate a sense of national unity in them. Independence became an end in itself in Burma rather than a means toward a united Burma.² After the introduction of British rule in Burma, Burmese nationalism remained quiet for a long time. It became evident in early twentieth century in the cultural field of Burma. The western-educated elite of Burma took a leading part in it. The result was the formation of Buddhist associations in Burma.³ Initially, national awakening in Burma came through the medium of religion. Buddhism was an important link which bound the people of Burma together.

The Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) was formed in Rangoon in 1906 on the line of Young Men's Christian Association. The YMBA aimed at promoting Buddhism, education and the national cultures. It soon became deep rooted and spread throughout Burma. It was organized by U Ba Pe, U Maung Gye, Ba Yin, U Sein Hla Aung and others. Young officers and clerks were mostly the members of this association.⁴ The YMBA was a non-political association, but it was soon associated with the nationalist activities. "The YMBA movement in Burma was not fiery nor aggressive, and it was more social in nature than political."⁵ The YMBA was important in the growth of nationalist movement as it attracted the young intellectuals of Burma. It had its branches in district towns and village providing communication throughout Burma. At the outset, the Y.M.B.A. had less than twenty members. But the strength of its members and the number of its branches

2. Johnstone, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

3. Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 731-38.

4. Maung Maung, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

5. Maung Hsin Aung, *The Stricken Peacock: Anglo-Burmese Relations, 1752-1948*, The Hague, 1965, p. 102.

increased rapidly.⁶ The *Thuriya* (The Sun) newspaper, started in 1911 in Burma, fully supported the YMBA movement.

The introduction of the Morley-Minto reforms in India in 1909 only very slightly affected the background to the growth of nationalism in Burma. The application of the reforms in Burma at the same period was of inferior degree. It did not provide the people of Burma any share in legislation. But it was significant in as much as it allowed the elective principle to develop.⁷ In 1910, the Burma Research Society was formed mainly through the efforts of J.S. Furnivall, a British civil servant, and U May Oung, a lawyer. It aroused a common interest among Burmese and western scholars towards the enhancement of knowledge.⁸ It did a lot to encourage the idea of national culture and character. But it kept itself aloof from politics for a long time. Thus, the influence of Buddhist religion, a sense of the glorious past before the British conquest of Burma, and inspiration from the Indian national movement contributed to the growth of national consciousness among the people of Burma before the outbreak of the First World War.

Even before the First World War a Burmese Buddhist monk U. Ottama attempted to arouse Burmese nationalist feelings against British rule. His visit to India and association with Indian revolutionaries aroused in him a sense of national feeling and he turned to be critical of the British government in Burma.⁹ Later during and after the war he identified himself with every form of agitation against the British government. His was the "first bold radical voice in Burmese politics."¹⁰

6 Maung Maung, *op. cit.*, v. 4.

7. Donnison, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

8. Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 738.

9. For details of U Ottama's life and activities, see S.R. Chakravarty, "Bhikhu U. Ottama—An Advocate of Indo-Burmese Friendship," *The Quarterly Review of Historical Studies*, Calcutta, Vol. XVII, No. 1, pp. 36-41.

10. Ba Maw, *Breakthrough in Burma: Memorirs of a Revolution, 1939-1946*, London, 1963, p. 8.

The First World War proved to be a definite landmark in the growth of nationalism as a potent political force in Burma. It brought about remarkable changes in numerous ways in the political outlook of the Burmese people. The war accelerated the political activities in Burma. Thus the growth of nationalism as a political force began rather late in Burma in comparison to India. World War I had a little direct impact on the growth of political consciousness in Burma. But indirectly it had a great impact on the political developments in Burma. It did a lot to do away with the provincialism in Burma and widened the political outlook of the people.¹¹ "The 'fourteen points' proposed by President Woodrow Wilson as the basis of a happier post-war world excited the imagination of all peoples who longed for independent nationhood."¹² Burma was bound to be influenced by it.

The YMBA movement came to be linked with political activities in the years 1916-18 on the issue of the 'Footwear Controversy'. An agitation was carried out against the wearing of shoes at Pagodas and other sacred places. It was the first popular expression of nationalist sentiment in Burma during the course of the First World War. It soon assumed national proportions. Ultimately the British surrendered to the Burmese demand. "Historically, it was the first clear victory won by means of mass protest and action in Burma, and it gave a great impetus to the growing national awareness. The new political leadership carried this victory into the field of national education, which, in many ways, was the basis of the whole national movement."¹³

However, it was only after the First World War that Burmese nationalism sprang suddenly and fully into new life at the time when fresh constitutional reforms for India were being proposed and debated. Burma became automatically

11. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 185.

12. Maung Maung, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

13. Ba Maw, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

involved with British plans for political reforms in India after the First World War. The Burmese people realised the significance of the political developments in India. "At the end of the war, Burma found itself carried along in the wake of a major revolutionary upheaval and constitutional reform programme centering in India. This provided Burma, ready-made with both the objectives and the methods of political agitation."¹⁴ An alarming political situation developed in India as an outcome of the nationalist agitation after the First World War. The British government gave an assurance of further political concessions to India to avoid any crisis.¹⁵ In August 1917, the Secretary of State for India, Montagu, announced that "the policy of His Majesty's Government...is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration, and the gradual development of self-governing institutions, with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of British Empire."¹⁶

This announcement of Montagu aroused high hopes among the Burmese people. But Montagu-Chelmsford Committee excluded Burma from its recommendations for constitutional reforms. It did not consider Burma to be politically advanced enough for these reforms. It took the stand that "Burma was not India." The exclusion of Burma from the reform scheme produced a strong wave of nationalist feeling in Burma. It quickly aroused political interest and activity in Burma. Burmese national sentiment flared up to fever pitch. Now the YMBA of Burma emerged as the political nerve-centre of nationalism. In July 1919, a delegation consisting of U Ba Pe, U Pu and U Tun Shein was sent to London from Burma by the YMBA to press for Burma's cause. The second YMBA delegation went to London in May 1920.¹⁷ This delegation even pressed for separation of

14. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, pp. 185-86.

15. Donnison, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

16. Hansard, *Commons*, 20 August 1917, col. 1965.

17. Maung Maung, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

Burma from India. Thus in Burma, "nationalism had emerged as a political force, organized and articulate..."¹⁸

Nationalism as a popular movement was quite evident in Burma after 1920. There was a rapid development of political activities in Burma from 1920 to 1923. "Nationalism thus became a grass-roots popular movement which the westernized elite could no longer fully direct or control..."¹⁹ The Indian Congress encouraged the Burmese nationalism from outside. The YMBA decided in annual conference at Prome in 1920 to launch a broader organization entitled General Council of Burmese Associations (GCBA). The emphasis was now shifted from "Buddhist" to "Burmese"; the avowed aim was to promote the national cause."²⁰ The leadership to the GCBA was provided by lawyers, businessmen, land-owners and journalists.

The GCBA throughout 1920's organised mass movements in Burma on the lines of Indian National Congress. An important political development took place in Burma with the opening of the new University of Rangoon in December, 1920. There followed a widespread national strike by students in protest against the education plans concerned with a new university. Now students came to be associated with national politics. The strike was a great success. It was fully supported by the GCBA. The Ninth Annual Conference of the G.C.B.A., held in October, 1921, at Mandalay, decided to observe the day of boycott by students as the National Day every year.²¹ The National movement moved forward after the return of the second delegation to Burma with demands for Home Rule or complete self-government as its objective. Burma now followed the Indian techniques of boycott and non-cooperation. The British ultimately decided in 1921 to

18. Donnison, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

19. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 213.

20. Maung Maung, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

supply the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms to Burma. The Whyte Committee modified the reforms and Burma was made a Governor's Province with effect from 2 January 1923. This marked a first instalment of Parliamentary democracy on the British model towards 'the progressive realization of responsible self-government' in Burma.²² Burma was given its first elected assembly after 1923. Burma was to remain under the dyarchical scheme till 1936.

The introduction of constitutional reforms under dyarchy failed to satisfy the nationalists aspirations of Burmese. It could derive little popular support. The dyarchy reform "was at best a make-shift, opportunist measure which had little relevance to Burma's wishes or needs."²³ Burmese were not satisfied with mere representative or even responsible government. They desired complete independent control of their political and economic life.²⁴ Under the dyarchical system, real power still lay in the hands of the Governor and his Councillors. The economic problems of Burma remained to be solved. Moreover, there was "somewhat unsettling air of impermanence"²⁵ about it, as it was mentioned by the Government of Burma Act of 1921 that after ten years a Statutory Commission should be appointed to consider the possibility of a further instalment of reforms.²⁶ The Shans, Chins, Kachines, and other minority races of Burma comprising about one third of the population were left out of the jurisdiction of reforms. The exclusion of these people from the reforms was primarily because they did not ask reforms.²⁷

The GCBA remained as a united organization only for a few years. It soon came to be divided over the question of participating in the dyarchical reforms or boycotting it.

22. Hall. *op. cit.*, p. 741.

23. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 230.

24. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

25. Donnison, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

26. Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 743.

27. Donnison, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

One faction, the moderates, who were to be known as 'The 21. Party', supported the new constitution and decided to participate in the elections to the Legislative Council. The other faction of extreme nationalists under the GCBA completely discarded the election and the constitution. They adopted the tactics of non-cooperation which eventually led to a campaign for the non-payment of taxes in 1924-25.²⁸ They also took recourse to local civil disobedience movement, the boycott of foreign goods and the defiance of the British administration. Thus a critical political situation developed in Burma and the working of the Legislative Council was seriously affected.

The British government appointed the Simon Commission in 1928 to study the functioning of the governmental reforms in Burma. The Commission recommended for the separation of Burma from India and other constitutional measures. It reasserted that Burma was not India and advised separate constitutional reforms for Burma.²⁹

An important issue, which engaged the attention of the politicians and people in Burma, was whether Burma should be separated from India or not. A resolution was passed in favour of separation in the first session of the Legislative Council under the 1923 Constitution. It truly reflected the general Burmese opinion. "Official circles, and more informed Burmese opinion, felt that the Indian connection was working to the disadvantage of Burma in several ways."³⁰ The question of separation became the burning issue for the remaining years of dyarchy. The Separationists and the Anti-Separationists came to the forefront. The first Round Table Conference in London from November 1930 to January, 1931 supported the separation of Burma and a Special Burma Round Table Conference from November 1931 to January 1932 agreed upon the

28. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

29. Maung Maung, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

30. Donnison, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

main lines of a constitution separated from India.³¹ The election in November, 1932, fought over the separation issue, however, gave a clear victory to the Anti-Separationists who captured 42 seats in the Legislative Council and 415,000 votes, whereas the separationists got only 29 seats and 250,000 votes.³² The Anti-Separationists were not entirely opposed to separation but they liked to be associated with India till the attainment of self-government.

There was an outburst of social and political unrest in Burma in 1930-31. Indo-Burmese labour riots broke out in Rangoon in May, 1930. It stimulated nationalist feelings. The concept of 'Burma for the Burmans' spread far and wide. Burmans were urged to save the national honour. "Burma is our country. Love her! Burmese is our language, cherish it!...It awakened the nation to the need for greater endeavours, beyond speech-making and grabbing office, for larger sacrifices and holder deeds."³³ It also marked the appearance of several angry youngmen on the political platform. In December 1930, the anti-British 'Tharrawaddy Rebellion' broke out under the leadership of Saya San. The outbreak took place in the form of violent attacks on police stations, other governmental institutions and on people who were found to be helping the government. The rebellion was a determined effort to overthrow the British government. But it was put down with heavy hands and Saya San was hanged. Rangoon was again troubled in December 1930 by a Sino-Burmese riot. The year 1938 witnessed rioting and attacks upon Indian Muslims in Burma. It started in Rangoon and soon spread all over the country. All these incidents undoubtedly stirred nationalism and anti-foreign feeling in Burma.³⁴ It was an important turning-point for the Burmese.

31. Cady, *South-East Asia, Its Historical Development*, p. 516. For details see also *Burma Round Table Conference, Proceedings*, Rangoon, 1932, pp. 30-34.

32. Maung Maung, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

34. W.S. Desai, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

The Dohama Asi-ayone (our Burma Association) was formed in early 1930. It aimed at complete independence. It emerged as an organized party and its members titled themselves "Thakin" or Master. But it took some years when the party came on firm footing.³⁵ Thakin Aung San and Thakin Nu joined the Dohama Asi-ayone and were able to bring some support to the party from the student community.³⁶ Thakin Soe, Thakin Lay Maung, Thakin Mya, and Thakin Tin designed the party as a medium for achieving independence.³⁷ It desired early and unconditional independence for Burma. It had also as its target the Government of Burma Act of 1935. However, "the Dohama remained primarily an extra-parliamentary political movement whose chief activity was seditious speechmaking."³⁸ In 1936, Ba Maw started a party known as 'The Sinyetha Party', the party for the poorman. It announced that independence was the first objective of the Burmese.

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Burma was separated from India and a new constitution came into operation. It granted to Burma a real measure of self-government. "The constitution was given body in the Government of Burma Act, 1935, and spirit in the Instrument of Instructions from His Majesty to the Governor."³⁹ This act contributed to the widening of democratic self-government in Burma in two ways. Firstly it rejected the dyarchy system and provided a cabinet of nine members fully responsible to an elected House of Representatives. Its second contribution was the addition of 33 new general constituencies to the House of Representatives.⁴⁰

The Thakin movement brought new potentialities in Burmese nationalism. It gave a new impetus to the freedom struggle. This movement can be traced back to early 1930's

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35. Maung Maung, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

36. U, Nu, *U. Nu.: Saturday's son*, London, 1975, p. 87.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

38. Richard Butwell, *U Nu of Burma*, California, 1953, p. 28.

39. Donnison, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-15.

40. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, pp. 351-52.

The word Thakin signifies revolutionary spirit, strong nationalism and honour.⁴¹ The Thakin movement gained momentum during the second student strike started by the Rangoon University Student's Union on 25, February 1936. The strike served as a rallying point for Burmese nationalist sentiment. Broadly, it was "a manifestation of the nation's latent feelings and resentment against foreign domination."⁴² Thakin Nu and Aung San took a leading part in the strike. Aung San became general secretary of the Thakin Party after leaving the university. The party got three seats in the House of Representatives in the General Elections of 1936.

Thakins were fully committed to independence. They were not ready to accept anything less than complete independence for Burma. They were quite ready to use violence for achieving their goal. "They developed an ideology that prepared for a general political and economic revolution in the country by armed conflict if necessary."⁴³ Their principle was to "live dangerously" and take risks. They were opposed to personal gains at the cost of nationalist cause.⁴⁴ They provided nationalist political direction to labour and peasant groups and favoured their immediate demands. They organized All-Burma Labour Conferences in which guest speakers from Indian National Congress were invited. The newspapers were also behind them. *The New Light of Burma*, edited by U Chit Maung, actively supported the young Thakins.⁴⁵ The branches of the Thakin Party were organized throughout Burma. It had more than two hundred active workers all over Burma. It soon became popular and the rallying point of the students and youths.⁴⁶ The Thakins were dedicated nationalists. "Many

41. S.R. Chakravarty, "Emergence of the Thakin Movement in Burma", *Indian History Congress Proceeding of the Thirty-Fifth Session*, Jadavpur, New Delhi, 1974, p. 403.

42. Butwell, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

43. Frank N. Trager, *Burma—From Kingdom to Republic*, London, 1966, p. 54.

44. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 376.

45. Maung Maung, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

46. Government of India, File No. 18/1/34, Home Political.

Thakin nationalists even at the end of the thirties were willing to accept outside help from any quarter, Congress Party India, Nationalist China, Communist China, or even Fascist Japan, in order to realize their primary objective of political independence.⁴⁷ The Indian National Congress was a source of inspiration to the young Thakins. As the Thakin movement gained in strength, the rivalries between its leaders grew.

The changing political climate in Asia was quickly reflected in Burma during the late thirties. The struggle for power was the main feature in party conflicts and personal rivalries. Ba Maw initiated a number of reform proposals as the first Prime Minister of Burma from 1937 to 1939.⁴⁸ His ministry was overthrown in February 1939, and U Pu formed a new coalition ministry.

The outbreak of war in Europe on 1, September 1939 gave an opportunity to Burma to realize her objectives. It was an occasion for the Burmese politicians to demand from the British Government constitutional reforms. Different elements of the political parties set up a "Freedom Bloc" in October 1939. Ba Maw was made its leader.⁴⁹ The bloc put forward three important demands as a condition of Burma's cooperation with British in the European war. Firstly, they demanded recognition of Burma's right to independence by Britain. Secondly, they desired preparations for calling a Constituent Assembly. Their third demand was cabinet supervision of the special authorities of the Governor. The Freedom Bloc was an ultranationalist organization. It derived its name from the Indian "Forward Bloc" led by Subhash Chandra Bose.⁵⁰ Aung San acted as the Secretary of the Freedom Bloc till he went underground.⁵¹

47. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 378.

48. John F. Cady, *The United States and Burma*, London, 1976, p. 144.

49. Maung Maung, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

50. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 416.

51. Aung San, *Burma's Challenge*, Rangoon, 1946, p. 1.

The rising tide of Burmese nationalism found expression in the young Thakins and students under the banner of the Burma Revolutionary Party. They devised ways and means of getting arms and assistance from friendly foreign powers to make an end to British imperialism. The coming of the war in 1939 stirred the nationalist movement of the Thakins. The British Government followed the policy of putting away the young revolutionary politicians in jail. But they did not succeed in their game. However, the movement of the Thakins was made illegal under the Defence of Burma Act in 1940. A number of Thakin leaders including Thein Maung, Ba Maw, Thakins Nu, Ba Hein, Soe and Ba Sein were arrested.⁵² But there was no end of young Thakins going to jail. They held the view that "our mothers brought us forth, the jails bring us up, the living is indeed easy."⁵³

Burma had the experience of four ministries from 1937 to 1942. After Ba Maw's first ministry was overthrown in February 1939, the next ministry was formed by U Pu of the People's Party which did not last long. U Saw, who founded Myochit Party, formed a new ministry on 9, September 1940. "U Saw's administration provided the country with a completely Burmanized leadership."⁵⁴ U Saw paid a visit to London on 10, October 1941 with a view to discuss dominion status for Burma after the war. But he was disappointed at the result of his conversations. He was told that it was not practicable to discuss Burma's future constitution in wartime. U Saw was arrested by British police in Egypt on 19, January 1942 on his way back after the outbreak of the Pacific War. The British suspected him to be in contact with Japan. Sir Paw Tun, member of the Patriotic Party, was appointed Premier in succession to U Saw, who was under detention.⁵⁵

Aung San was responsible for formulation of a number

52. Trager, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

53. Maung Maung, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

54. Ma Mya Sein, *Burma*, London, 1943, p. 29.

55. Maurice Collis, *Last and First in Burma 1941-48*, 1956, pp. 47-48.

of important decisions and policies of the Thakin Party. He was arrested and detained as a Thakin leader in early 1939 but was released shortly.⁵⁶ Aung San visited India in March 1940 as leader of the Thakin delegation to the Ramgarh Session of the Indian National Congress. He met Gandhi, Bose and Nehru there. A warrant of arrest on his return to Burma precipitated his flight to Amoy. He was taken to Tokyo from there. Aung San was not alone. In all there were "Thirty Comrades", later known as "Thirty Heroes", who were given military training at Hainan Island by the Japanese.⁵⁷ Thus an active collaboration with the Japanese on the part of the leader of Burma's "Thirty Heroes"⁵⁸ began. Actually there was a marked difference among the Thakins themselves over the Japanese collaboration-proposal. Thakin Ne Win went to Japan in 1941 and received instructions regarding future role of the proposed Burma Independence Army. The Burma Independence Army was inaugurated on 26, December 1941.⁵⁹ Arrangements were made to smuggle various groups of Burmans to Japan for military training. There was an understanding that Japan would supply arms to the Burma Revolutionary Party. There were other Burmans, outside the "Thakin" group, who were in touch with the Japanese secretly before the Japanese invasion. Ba Maw and Thein Maung had contacts with Japan prior to the Japanese invasion. U Saw was imprisoned by the British for being pro-Japanese. A group of students also attempted to get to Japan even before the departure of the "Thirty Comrades". Thakin Ba Sein and his group managed to send about half of the group and some others to Japan.⁶⁰ The doctrinaire communists, Thakin Soe and Thein Pe Myint, and communist Thakin Than Tun, however, opposed the Japanese from the very beginning. These men were the main leaders of the Burma Revolutionary Party (BRP). However, the Thakins reached an agreement with Japanese agents

56. Aung San, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

57. Trager, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

58. For details about Thirty Comrades see Appendix-I, pp. 208-212.

59. Maung Maung, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

60. Johnstone, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

sometime in 1939 or early 1940. The agreement was afterwards enforced by Colonel Minami. The BRP decided to recruit the men to be trained by the Japanese as officers for a future independent Burma and a Burma Independence Army.⁶¹ This army re-entered Burma in the wake of the Japanese invasion of 1942. The Japanese considered Burma as an inseparable part of their new vision of an East Asian Co-Prosperity Community, which took a definite shape in the middle of 1941. In this way the Japanese ambitions in Burma began and developed.⁶²

The Burmese nationalists made three attempts early in the war to realize their objectives by peaceful and cooperative means. It was announced by the Secretary of State for Burma, Mr. Amery, in November 1941 that it was the objectives of the British Government to help Burma in attaining dominion status as speedily and fully as may be possible immediately after the conclusion of a victorious war. This statement was confirmed by the Governor of Burma. Earlier, the request of U Saw for a constitution to grant Burma dominion status in 1940 was refused by the British. The second attempt was made when the Atlantic Charter of August 1941 aroused hopes in Burma for dominion status. It was said in point three of the Charter that the signatories "respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of Government under which they will live."⁶³ On 9, September 1941, Prime Minister Churchill made a statement in the House of Commons regarding British policy of establishing Burmese self-government by measures which were in progress. But this statement did not satisfy the Burmese nationalists. As mentioned earlier U Saw, along with U Tin Tut, went to London for the second time in October 1941 with a request for dominion status after the war.⁶⁴ He saw Churchill twice but was unsuccessful in achieving his aim. He was arrested on his way back and remained under detention in Uganda till 1946.

61. Trager, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

62. Ba Maw, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

63. Trager, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

64. *Ibid.*

A third attempt was made by the Thakins when Japan surprised the British by entering Burma at the end of 1941. Aung San and his thirty comrades re-entered Burma. Several thousand men were added to the BIA by Aung San. The Allies attempted to gain the support of the Thakins in April 1942 when the Japanese armed forces were poised for an attack on Mandalay, the last British stronghold in Burma. The communist leaders including Soe, Kyaw Sein, and Ba Hein of the Thakins group, who were in the Mandalay jail, were ready to accept the offer of the British. They desired to fight "the Fascists."⁶⁵ But Thakin Nu, through a resolution to the British Governor, Dorman-Smith, made it clear that the British authorities should proclaim Burmese independence now or promise it immediately at the end of the war. Only then the British could get the support of the Thakins.⁶⁶ Thakin Nu considered that a proclamation or promise of Burmese independence by Britain could still turn the Burmese against the Japanese. However, we do not have any public record of a British reply to U Nu's proposal. But in any case it was not very important because the Japanese advance in Burma could not be checked. Thus the Burmese efforts to exploit Britain's involvement in the European War after 1939 proved to be ineffective. The British Government failed to inspire the Burmese peoples to rise and resist the Japanese invader.

Thus the nationalist feelings in Burma were at high tide when Japan entered the war and advanced to Rangoon rapidly. An anti-British sentiment united the Burmese nationalists in one solid mass. "Britain's difficulty is our opportunity", was the popular slogan of the day.⁶⁷ However, the events of the war disrupted completely the normal process of political evolution in Burma. But it must be admitted that the Burmese

65. *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

66. Thakin Nu, *Burma Under the Japanese*, New York, 1954, p. 20.

67. Maung Maung, *Burma in the Family of Nations*, Amsterdam, 1956, p. 90.

nationalism became conscious and vocal well before the Japanese conquest of Burma. It became organized into political parties and spread all over the country. It emerged as a political movement with an ultimate demand for complete independence. The Japanese conquest of Burma exercised a decisive influence upon the growth of nationalism as a political force in Burma.

Burma Under Japanese Rule

The Japanese conquest and occupation of Burma from 1942 to 1945 inaugurated a new era in the history of Burma. It constituted a milestone in accelerating Burmese nationalist developments. The Second World War and the Japanese conquest of Burma marked the sudden collapse of British rule and the expulsion of the British by the Japanese in 1942. The British Burma Government went into exile at Simla in India to await the end of the War. Now the political future of Burma turned to be as an event of great significance. The Burmans derived wide administrative experiences during the Japanese occupation.

Japan had certain aspirations and objectives behind conquest of Burma. Numerous slogans like 'a New Order in Asia', 'a Co-prosperity Sphere', and 'Asia for the Asiatics' were new expressions reflecting a policy that had been developing in Japan in the 1930's. Japan wanted to construct an Asian Pacific empire by late 1930's. She had an intention to dominate economically and exercise a sphere of influence in Southeast Asia.¹ There were some elements in Japan which

1. Frank N. Trager Ed., *Burma: Japanese Military Administration, Selected Documents, 1941-45, Historical Notes*, Philadelphia, 1971, p. 4.

believed in the possibility of continuing superior economic position of Japan in Southeast Asia. Japan considered herself capable of freeing at least some of the Southeast Asian countries from western colonial control. She had an objective that numerous peoples of Southeast Asia would enjoy various degrees of autonomy. But all of them would be incorporated into the Japanese Empire as vassal political and economic units. She aimed at lowering the western prestige completely. Thus Japan would come out as "the leader, the light of Asia."²

Japan contemplated plans for the conquest of Burma much earlier. But Burma was less significant in her early plans for New Order in Eastern Asia. Japanese collection of military and political information in Burma may be traced back to the middle of the 1930's. U Saw visited Japan in 1935 and purchased *The Sun* newspaper after his return from there. The subsequent publication of Japanese-sponsored propaganda by the newspaper may be regarded as a part of the Japanese programme of preparation. Again, Thein Maung's visit to Japan in the autumn of 1939 and the pro-Japanese tone of his newspaper, *New Burma*, indicated the intensification of Japanese efforts immediately after the outbreak of the European War. But there was not any organized contact between any section of the Burmese people and Japan for the overthrow of British rule in Burma prior to 1939. The Japanese disaster might have been averted by determined leadership, wise statesmanship and adequate preparation.³ The Minami Kikan or special military agency under the charge of Colonel Minami was one of many such special agencies organized by authorities in Japan. The members of these organizations were secretly sent to foreign countries. They were disguised as correspondents, travellers, businessmen, scholars, etc. They gathered political, military or social information and supplied them to

2. Cady, *South East Asia: Its Historical Development*, p. 566.

3. N.C. Sen, *A Peep into Burma Politics, 1917-1942*, Allahabad, 1945, p. 84.

their home government.⁴ It is difficult to say for how long Japan had been spying in Burma. But the Japanese General Staff to Burma sent a military officer, Minami, disguised as a civilian, in May 1940. His aim was to gain the armed support of the Burmese in case of Japanese invasion of the country. He made contact with most of the political parties in Burma. He assured prospects of independence in return for their co-operation. But he was not in close link with the Thakins. It was probably because the Thakins did not appear very influential at that time. Moreover, the Thakins, with their communist leanings, preferred the idea to co-operate with Indian communists, with China, or with Russia.⁵

Minami, also known as Bo Mogye or Suzuki, was a friend of the entire Burmese nation in spite of his being a Japanese. His idea and objective must be regarded as pro-Burmese. He was really desirous of promoting Burma's independence. He came to Rangoon in July 1940 and made contact with Burmese leaders through the good offices of Japanese Buddhist monk, G G. Nagi.⁶ He narrowly escaped from British Intelligence in November 1940 and left Burma for Formosa. He carried with him Thakin Aung San and party from Formosa to Japan. They reached Bangkok on December 26, 1941 and organized the BIA with Suzuki as Commander-in-Chief. Suzuki said to Burmese leaders in the book named *Five Years in Burma*, "Don't worry about Burmese independence. Independence is not one to be asked for from others : it is to be declared and taken. If Japan does not give independence, we must make a move to such a place as Twante and declare it by force, and form a Government of our own. It is not very difficult. If they shoot, we will shoot back."⁷ Indeed, he was able to win the support and respect of such Burmese nationalists who believed in struggle as the only

4. Trager Ed., *Burma: Japanese Military Administration*, p. 6.

5. Donnison, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

6. Trager Ed., *Burma: Japanese Military Administration*, p. 6.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

remaining method for achieving independence from the British rule.

Japan had no plan for the military occupation of Burma till the end of 1940. She intended to get the support of Burmese nationalists to put an end to British rule. Her objective behind this was to facilitate her military advance into Burma. She planned to create disturbances throughout Burma with a view to hamper the enemy's operations and to induce the Burmese to co-operate fully with Japan.⁸ The objective of Burma operation was to arouse the people of Burma to revolt against Great Britain and establish their independence.

The Japanese launched their well-planned invasion on Burma in the second half of December immediately after the outbreak of the war in the Far East on 8 December, 1941. Burma was quite unprepared. The Japanese attack came more suddenly than anticipated. British preparations for the defence of Burma were quite inadequate.

Burma was made fully responsible for its own military forces after her separation from India. Burma's forces came under the British chiefs of staff for operational purposes in September 1939. But it still remained under Burma Government for finance and administration. In November 1940, operational control was placed under Far Eastern Command in Singapore. But the administrative responsibility came to be divided between the Burma Government and the War Office in London.⁹ Obviously, British rule in Burma was not prepared to face the coming battle. There were scant forces in Burma. It was stated by the Government in Rangoon House of Representatives in 1938 that the Burma Army consisted of only 159 Burmans, 3040 other indigenous races, 1423 Indians and 1587 British soldiers.¹⁰

8. Document No. 1. "Plan For The Burma Operation" in Trager edited, *Burma: Japanese Military Administration*, p. 27.

9. William Slim, *Defeat into Victory*, London, 1956, p. 11.

10. Trager Ed., *Burma: Japanese Military Administration*, p. 10.

The Japanese campaign resulting in the occupation of Burma commenced. Japan's strategy was to use the 15th Army, supported by the 10th Air Brigade, for the conquest of Burma. Rangoon received the first two air raids on 23 and 25 December, 1941. A large number of people, mainly Indians, evacuated the city. The Japanese took Victoria Point, the southernmost town in Burma, during December 1941. They were in possession of Tenasserim and the useful ports and air fields of Mergui, Tavoy, and Monlmein by the end of January. The penetration of Lower Burma resulted in the occupation of Pegu on 7, March and of Rangoon on the following day. The whole of Lower Burma fell into the hands of the Japanese with the fall of Toungoo, Prome, and Magwe on 30 March, 2 April, and 16 April respectively. The Japanese capture of Mandalay took place on 1 May, 1942.¹¹ The Japanese were in complete occupation of Burma by the end of May, 1942.

The Japanese victory over Burma was one of the most surprising military achievements in history. The campaign was remarkably a grand success. In only about five months the Japanese occupied a country larger than France.¹² The British were compelled to retreat about one thousand miles. It was the longest retreat ever suffered by a British army. There were some 10,036 casualties on the British side.¹³ The Burmese population showed no hostility to the retiring British-Indian forces.

The attitude of the Burmese to the possibility of a Japanese invasion was determined by the fact that they conceived of their country as already occupied by foreigners. In the prevailing circumstances the vast majority of the Burmese people relied on "Safety First" and offered no resistance to the

11. *Ibid.*

12. J.L. Christian, *Burma and the Japanese Invader*, Bombay, 1945, p. 348.

13. Brigadier Sir John Smyth, "The Long Retreat, The First Burmese Campaign" in Sir Basil Liddell edited, *History of the Second World War*, London, p. 963.

Japanese.¹⁴ A minority of the Burmese were actively pro-Japanese. They looked upon Japan as the champion of the Asiatic races and the liberator of Burma from western domination. Japanese propaganda was subtle and effective. They popularised the slogan of 'Asia for Asians.' Their armies were moving forward with the torch of liberation in their hands.¹⁵

The assistance of Burman nationalists to the Japanese invaders was quite effective. The nucleus of the BIA was introduced into Burma in late December, 1941. As an independent military organization, it marched and fought in their own way in Burma. The underground political supporters of the BIA in Burma had been organizing, recruiting, and making preparations for their arrival. The Japanese never supplied arms to the BIA except one thousand rifles and one hundred army pistols in the beginning.¹⁶ Small advance BIA contingents were dispatched in December 1941. Their mission was to reach Rangoon before the arrival of the main Japanese force there. Other contingents participated in the victories in the Tenasserim cities and countryside. One group of the BIA was associated with the 55th Japanese Division of the 15th Army for the attack on Moulmein.¹⁷ The Japanese usually discouraged their participation in direct hostilities. They mainly acted as interpreters, guides, avenues of intelligence, saboteurs and arsonists. The maximum strength of the BIA was around thirty thousand. The majority of these young men were recruited by Thakin leaders. In some cases Burmese soldiers in the British Burma Rifles joined them on huge scale. The friction between the BIA and the Japanese forces frequently occurred over the question of post-victory military administration. This issue was regarded by the Burmese as the test of Japanese good faith in the promise of independence. The BIA was reorganized into two divisions under Aung San commanding and Bo Let Ya as Chief of Staff after the fall of Rangoon

14. N.C. Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

15. Maung Maung, *Burma in the Family of Nations*, p. 81.

16. M. Thein Pe, *What Happened in Burma*, Allahabad, 1943, p. 31.

17. Trager, *Burma: Japanese Military Administration*, p. 11.

in March 1942.¹⁸ The governmental operations of BIA failed to keep pace with the rapid Japanese advance into Upper Burma.

Colonel Suzuki appointed Thakin Tun Oke, one of the Thirty Comrades, as Chief Administrator of Burma. His Burma Baho Government was in charge of the country from the beginning of April to early June 1942. Mostly the Thakins were appointed on various important posts in the state. But they could not keep law and order under control. Neither the Japanese nor the people felt satisfied. The Japanese liked to run the administration smoothly for gaining the favour of the Burmese people. The Nipponese Commander-in-Chief, Iida, soon realized that the Burma Baho Government would not serve the purpose. The conditions of growing anarchy in the country forced the Japanese to make preparations towards the end of May, 1942 for the reorganization of Burma Government under the leadership of Ba Maw. Burma Baho Government came to an end on 4 June, 1942.

Tun Oke's Burma Baho Government was replaced by direct Japanese military administration in early June, 1942. A meeting was held to discuss the formation of a government in Burma on lines approved by the Japanese Military Command. Some Burman leaders desired proclamation of their independence and the establishment of a Republic. But the Japanese army was not in favour of a 'Preparatory Committee.' It was, in effect, little more than a committee to facilitate pacification. So there was a big gap between what the Burmans demanded and what the Japanese would sanction. An acute disagreement among the Burmese leaders led to the adjournment of the meeting without taking any concrete decision.¹⁹

A new form of Government was instituted in Burma on 1 August 1942. Ba Maw, who recently escaped from Mogok jail, was authorised by the Japanese to organize a coalition of

18. *Ibid.*

19. Thakin Nu, *Burma Under the Japanese*, p. 24.

the various Nationalists groups. It was known as the 'Executive Administration.' The Chief Executive Officer was Ba Maw, an experienced pre-war nationalist political leader. He was able than Tun Oke in handling the Japanese and safeguarding Burma's nationalist interests.²⁰

The newly established Burmese administration was under the control of the Japanese Military Administration, led by General Iida. The Budget and Defence portfolios were reserved to the Japanese. The Burmans were to administer Revenue, Forests, Education, Commerce and Labour portfolios.²¹ The Premier of Japan had announced before the invasion of Burma that independence would be given to Burma after the occupation of the country by Japanese troops. But the form of Government now established in Burma was a negation of that promise. The new Government of Burma was simply a central administration led by Ba Maw. All its actions were subject to acceptance or rejection by the Japanese Commander-in-Chief. At the time of appointing this Government, the Japanese Commander-in-Chief said: "The new Government will work in collaboration with the Japanese Military Administration and supreme power over it will be held by the Japanese Commander-in-Chief. The Government will also avoid any policy which may clash with that of the Japanese Military Administration."²² It was clearly stated by the Japanese Premier, Tojo, and General Iida that Japan did not fail to give assistance to make Burma for the Burmese. Iida sincerely hoped that it would be realized as soon as possible. He said: "The Japanese army wishes the Indians will achieve their long-cherished independence, just as much as it does the Burmese."²³ Under the new Administration the Burma Parliament disappeared. The freedom of the press was also abolished. The Administration could carry out only the

20. Trager, *Burma: Japanese Military Administration*, p. 12.

21. Government of India, External Affairs Department, File No. 28 X (P) (Secret), 1942.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*

objective of the military administration.²⁷ At all times the manpower of the Burmese army, whether it was known as the BIA, the Burma Defence Army (BDA), or the Burma National Army (BNA), remained under the effective control of Aung San. Other Burmese officers were also loyal to him. Excepting a few communists like Thein Pe, Soe, and Tin Shwe, Burmese nationalist, socialist, and communist leaders co-operated with the Japanese at the beginning.²⁸

On 28 January, 1943, during the 80th session of the Imperial Diet, Premier Tojo announced Japan's intention of recognizing Burma as an independent state within a year. He might have felt the need to enlist support among the Burmese. He invited Ba Maw, Thein Maung, Thakin Mya and Aung San to visit Tokyo for talks.²⁹ He arranged for them to be received by the Japanese Emperor and to award them various decorations. During their ten days' stay they discussed with the various Ministers of Japan the issue of future political development of Burma.³⁰ Before their departure, Tojo reaffirmed Japan's intention to see that

New Burma would, through her own incentive and responsibility, speedily substantiate her status as a fully independent state at the same time to cooperate closely with Nippon...as a member of.. the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere...With regard to territorial composition of the New State of Burma, it is to include the whole territory of Burma with the exception of Shan and Karenni areas.³¹

The Burmese proceeded to form an Independence Preparatory Commission on 8 May, 1943. It consisted of eighteen

27. For details see Trager, *Burma: Japanese Military Administration*, pp. 17-22.

28. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 60.

29. Maung Maung, *Burma's Constitution*, The Hague, 1959, p. 58.

30. M. B. K., "Burma's War-Time Constitution", *The Guardian* (Rangoon), Vol. VII, No. 10, p. 31.

31. Quoted in Trager, *Burma: Japanese Military Administration*, p. 12.

well-recognized nationalists with Ba Maw as Chairman. The Commission was to draft a constitution simple but effective, for New Burma.³² The Commission functioned under strict Japanese supervision. The Japanese adviser to the Preparatory Commission, Isomura, actually drafted Burma's declaration of independence and her relations with Japan.³³ The Commission completed its work in June and reported to the Japanese accordingly. In July Ba Maw went to Singapore and met Toja and Bose. He discussed with them the future Independence of Burma.

Burma was granted independence by the Japanese on 1 August, 1943. She was declared to be an independent sovereign state. Ba Maw became the Head of the State, or Adipadi. He immediately joined Japan in a declaration of war against England and the United States. The Japanese Military Administration was dissolved. Japan and her allies gave recognition to Burma. A treaty of alliance with Japan was signed. The cabinet of Ba Maw included the following: Aung San as Defence Minister, Thakin Mya as Deputy Prime Minister, Thakin Than Tun as Agriculture Minister, Thakin Nu as Foreign Minister, and Thakin Lay Maung as Communications and Irrigation Minister.³⁴

A Japan-Burma Secret Military Agreement was signed on 1 August, 1943. Article one of the Agreement gave to the Japanese forces entire freedom of action in respect to military operations in Burma. The Burmese government agreed to provide the Japanese forces with every necessary assistance in the execution of military operation in Burma. According to article two, the Burmese government pledged to place Burmese forces under the command of the Supreme Commander of the Japanese Occupation Forces in Burma.³⁵ Thus the Japanese

32. Maung Maung, *Burma's Constitution*, p. 59.

33. Butwell, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

34. For details, see Burma Intelligence Bureau, *Burma during the Japanese Occupation*, India, 1943.

35. Document No. 39. "Japan-Burma Secret Military Agreement" in Trager edited, *Burma: Japanese Military Administration*, p. 153.

political authority and their military power ensured that the Burmese government complied with Japanese requirements in all matters essential to the conduct of the war. Even then the new government of Burma was much less subjected to direct administrative interference. The constitution was mainly fascist and Japanese in nature. Article four accorded full sovereign status and powers to Ba Maw. The cabinet was responsible to him.

The independence of Burma did not bring large material gains. But it proved to be a great psychological tonic. Burmese people realized that now they had their own national Government. They were also provided with their own courts and National Army. Their dream appeared to be fulfilled. The war and independence brought about a significant change in the basic structure of society in Burma. Social values changed which worked good for the people.³⁶

The high watermark of Ba Maw regime came shortly after independence. An Assembly of the Greater East Asian Nations was convened by Japan in Tokyo in November 1943. This significant event marked the assembly of some independent Asian countries for the first time in history. In addition to Burma and Japan, China, Thailand, Manchukuo and the Philippines attended it. Bose, the head of the government of Azad Hind or Free India, acted as an observer.³⁷ The Assembly was completely dominated by the new Asian spirit. Premier Tojo was elected its Chairman. Ba Maw observes: "This great Assembly was the first visual manifestation of the new spirit stirring in Asia..."³⁸ Bose was of the view that the keynote of the conference was expressed by Ba Maw in a characteristic way. It was that 'East Asia was one'. Bose was the charismatic figure at this Assembly. But Ba Maw believed that he "gave the clearest utterance of all to the new Asian consciousness

36. Maung Maung, *Burma's Constitution*, pp. 61-62.

37. Trager, *Burma: Japanese Military Administration*, p. 12.

38. Ba Maw, *op. cit.*, p. 339.

and spirit."³⁹ This conference led to the emergence of the Asian consciousness, spirit, and pride for the first time as an actual world force. It accounted for a new phase of evolution in Asia.

Ba Maw and his Thakin associates in the government played an effective role during the last twenty months of the Japanese occupation of Burma. During this period the Japanese planned for an attack on India by using Burma as a base. The basic structure of the independent Burmese government of 1943 was almost the same as in British period. Still it differed from the British rule in a number of ways. The presence of the Japanese advisers in all important civilian offices in Burma was a significant change. All important decisions were to be taken in consultation with them. Indeed, both political and economic spheres of Burma were under the control of the Japanese.⁴⁰ Japan did not establish a bureaucracy of her own in Burma to run the administration. Ba Maw and his government was left free to manage this state of affairs. But the Japanese army kept a close eye over the Burmese bureaucracy. The Burmese press and the radio were censored by the Japanese officials.

Ba Maw followed a plan of national mobilization of man-power resources of Burma. It was mainly based on a revolutionary concentration of power along fascist lines. He appeared to be critical of democratic methods and principles at that time. The new government under Ba Maw showed great pro-Japanese activity. Ba Maw implemented his plan by mobilizing the entire population under ten functional categories. They were to work in the closest possible co-operation with the Japanese Army. All the ten groups were to be unified together.

There were only a limited number of individual followers of Ba Maw who appreciated his ability and performance. But he failed to command popular support. His pride and vanity

39. *Ibid.*, p. 342.

40. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, pp. 461 ff.

overshadowed his humanitarian considerations. However, as Adipadi he did not play a despotic role.

In 1944 The All Burma Youth League (ABYL) came to replace the East Asia Youth League. It joined hands with the secret Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPEL) as a constituent member unit. In August 1944, the Maha Bama (Greater Burma) Party was launched in Burma. Its aim was to unite all the peoples of Burma under Burmese rule with "one language" and "one country". But the move was not very successful.⁴¹

Only a limited group of Burmans concerned with the government and some others actually appreciated the efforts made by Ba Maw to protect his people from Japanese exploitation and ill-treatment. But the majority of Burmese population either distrusted or hated him.

Ba Maw was successful in maintaining friendly and fruitful relations with Premier Tojo. But he failed to establish good relations with Japanese military commanders in Burma. Burma was represented in Tokyo by a close personal follower of Ba Maw, Thein Maung, till the end of the war. A procession of Burmese missions, including politicians, educationists, newspapermen, businessmen, and students, went over to Japan. But Burmese students were restricted to come in close contact with the Japanese people. However, Burmese visitors were largely influenced by the magnificent technological advance of Japan as an Asiatic nation.

Premier Tojo's promise of early 1943 to accord a great measure of Burman independence under the leadership of Ba Maw did not find favour with the Japanese leadership in Burma. Ba Maw demanded and achieved the formal cession of most of the Shan States to Burma. A treaty was signed between the Ba Maw government and the Japanese in Rangoon on 25 September, 1943. By this treaty the Shan States could

41. Johnstone, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

be incorporated into Burma. These territories were to be free from Japanese military control within ninety days of the signing of the treaty. They would come under the Ba Maw government.⁴²

Ba Maw raised serious objection to the interference of the Japanese army in Burma's political matters and establishing Japanese business firms as an economic monopoly. An attempt was made on the life of the Adipadi on 17 February, 1944.

A revision of Ba Maw's booklet named *Burma's New Order Plan* was published in June, 1944. He emphatically said in it that Burmans were not ready to fight unless they were accorded a real stake in the outcome of the war. He put forward four minimum essential conditions for Burma's co-operation with Japan. Firstly, non-interference of the Japanese in Burma's political affairs was demanded. The second condition asked the Japanese not to take opinion polls. Thirdly, Burmese government servants were to be given some equal ranks with officers in the Japanese army. The last condition was concerned with the reduction of friction between the Japanese army and business firms and the people with the help of Burmese liaison officers. Ba Maw put forward Burma's claim to enemy property in October, 1944. Personal ambition and nationalist considerations prevented Ba Maw from playing the role of a puppet. "Though an opportunist, he was also a dedicated nationalist and no puppet of Japan..."⁴³

The role of the Thakins in the government of Ba Maw was quite notable. They participated in the pseudo-independent government mainly to avoid a rift within nationalist ranks. They also shared the resentment of the Burmese people against the Japanese. The Thakin members of the government were popularly alleged of having selfish motives in accepting office under such humiliating conditions. Bitterness and rivalries developed within the Thakin Party.

42. *Ibid.* For more details, see also U Tnn Pe, *Sun Over Burma*, Rangoon, 1949.

43. Butwell, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

The Thakin ministers differed from Ba Maw in various ways. They used their opportunity to build organisations and political followings. Thakin Mya, Nu, Thon Tun, Aung San, Lay Mung, and Lun Baw still commanded the faith of a youthful nationalist following. Aung San, Defence Minister, was the recognised leader of the BDA.

The Thakin leaders in the government had a number of advantages. The relationship between Ba Maw and the Japanese provided a cover for the Thakins towards their goal of independence. Thakins Aung San and Than Tun were the holdest among them. Under the cover of their ministerial position, they plotted for the end of the Japanese rule. Thakin Nu was of the view that Ba Maw was quite aware of the various plans made by the "Inner Circle" of the Thakins. But he never divulged them to the Japanese. There was no one to match him in resisting Japanese pretensions.⁴⁴

The anti-Japanese Thakin leaders, both within and outside the government, were largely instrumental in organizing the AFPFL in 1944. Its main leaders were Thakins Aung San and Thon Tun. The communist convictions of Than Tun actually matured during the war time. Both Aung San and Than Tun were dedicated nationalists. Aung San declared on 1 August, 1944, the first anniversary of Burma's independence, that the freedom of Burma existed only on paper. It was far away from reality. Ba Maw was not happy with it. Thakin Nu departed himself from his role as Foreign Minister after August, 1944. He helped in organizing the Maha Bama Party which came under the active leadership of Bandoolla U Sein in November, 1944.

The Thakin leaders were referred to by Ba Maw as 'Unsophisticated Youths'. But he declined to reveal to the Japanese the resistance plot of the Thakins. The leaders of the AFPFL had full faith in the integrity of Ba Maw as a nationalist. The final cabinet meeting of Ba Maw government

44. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 61.

was held on 22 April, 1945. The very next day he evacuated the capital and went over to Moulmein along with his personal followers and Thakins Mya, Nu, and Lun Baw. Rangoon came under the occupation of the British forces on 5 May, 1945. Thus nearly two years old independent Burma government of Baw Maw came to an end.

Three years of Japanese rule in Burma was an important phase in the history of the country. It had certain remarkable consequences. The turn of events during this period brought about profound changes in the attitude and outlook of the Burman nationalist leaders and the people. Many political leaders shared a variety of experiences under the Japanese from 1942 to 1945. Later they were directly concerned in the successful struggle for independence after 1945. It was the Japanese rule during which nationalist leaders of Burma cut their political teeth. Experience in the art of politics and the operation of government was gained mainly during this period by the post-war nationalist leaders. The period also witnessed the unremitting struggle for Burmese independence and its impact on the interests and plans of the parties involved. The contributions of the Japanese to political architecture in Burma were largely negative. But Burma's national unity emerged out of the Japanese rule. The entry of Burmans into the sphere of industry and commerce was a remarkable effect of Japanese rule. Burmans learnt to live a difficult and industrious life during the eventful years of World War II and the Japanese occupation of Burma.⁴⁵

The Japanese were welcomed in Burma mainly because they were treated as national and racial liberators. They had a unique opportunity of selling their Co-Prosperity Sphere to the Burmese people. They posed themselves as liberators and co-religionist brothers from the East. They claimed that they had shed their blood in order to drive away the western imperialists.⁴⁶ Many of the political leaders of Burma were

45. Thein Pe, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

46. U Kyaw Min, *The Burma We Love*, Calcutta, 1945, p. 78.

either in jail or busy in organizing a rising against the British at the time of arrival of the Japanese in the country. All of them, however, did not blink upon the advent of the Japanese with happiness. Everybody in Burma, who took even little interest in politics, knew all about the Japanese. The whole air was full of rumours. "The Japanese are our great friends." "When a Japanese meets a Burman he greets him with our own war cry." "The Japanese will die for Burma's freedom." "A Burman Prince is coming as a leader in the Japanese army."⁴⁷ The Japanese scored a notable propaganda victory in granting nominal independence to Burma.

The first political result of the Japanese occupation of Burma was the fusion and co-mingling of the numerous Burmese political parties in the name of independence. They forgot their internal differences and rivalries and stood as one to fight for freedom. The Japanese deliberately attempted to build up Burmese nationalism to achieve their own ends. But unintentionally they stimulated it in the opposite direction through their brutal actions in Burma. The Japanese soon became aware of the fact that the Burmese sense of nationalism and desire for real independence were very strong. The Japanese authorities in Burma took a number of measures to conciliate the Burmese.⁴⁸

The Japanese declaration of the independence of Burma on 1 August, 1943 exercised a profound effect on political developments in the country. The constitution of the new government contained a number of democratic features. But they remained inoperative due to Japan's emergency powers. The new cabinet under the leadership of Ba Maw was granted autonomy in principle. It was free to function within the limits permitted by the Japanese in matters of non-military concern. But the Japanese advisers were in a position to exercise effective control on all levels of administration. Japan

47. Thakin Nu, *Burma Under the Japanese*, p. 20.

48. J.L. Christian, *op. cit.*, p. 351.

controlled the budget, defence and reconstruction and other subjects relating to the war.⁴⁹

Ba Maw government under Japanese derived certain significant advantages. Many of the Burman independence leaders were able to gain the first experience in government positions of responsibility. Aung San, Thakin Nu, and a number of their associates, got their first real governmental experience under the Japanese rule. But the nature and structure of this government was different from that which they choose finally for Burma according to their liking. However, this wartime experience shaped the ideas and attitudes of many Burman leaders. It generated into them some habits of political behaviour and ideas regarding the functions of government. It had an effect on the post-independence conduct of these leaders.⁵⁰

The Japanese exploited with great skill the prevailing trend to militant nationalism in Burma. "The Japanese have astutely fanned the flames of Burmese nationalism, and made still more complex the complicated task of harnessing this nationalism to a stable and workable democratic constitution."⁵¹ Indeed, all real power was retained in Japanese military commanders. Japanese had the idea that independence must be played down and the more ardent nationalists should be shunted into relatively unimportant posts in Burma.

The Japanese were assisted by determined Burmese nationalists in their initial victory over the British. Burma suffered a large sacrifice in lives and treasure for Japan in the war. She insisted on her independence after a victorious finish of the war. The Burmese nationalists were frequently looked down upon by the British during the war time.

49. *Ibid.*

50. Johnstone, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

51. Govt. of India, Deptt. of Commonwealth Relations, File No. F. 47-2/44-O.S.

Burmese Independence was part of an ambiguous policy within a militarily strategic and tactical equation for the Japanese.⁵² Independence was speedily and brilliantly executed with the help of determined Burmese nationalists. It was because the Japanese policy of Burma's independence was never reliably upheld. Japan always subordinated the question of Burma's independence to her military goals. Japan lost her credibility among Burmese nationalists which she had gained earlier. They turned against Japan. The Burmese nationalists, however, differed much on all other matters. But the war offered them an opportunity to regain their lost but cherished independence. They made all efforts to achieve it and ultimately they succeeded.⁵³

It is difficult to assume that the harsh, brutal, and arbitrary treatment of the Burmans at the hands of the Japanese military was the only factor which made the Burman leaders in the independent government to rise in revolt against the Japanese. They could not presume correctly about the end of the war. They could get little authentic news of the progress of war through other sources.⁵⁴

Many of the Burman leaders felt that their dream for independence could not be realised under the Japanese rule. It could only be fulfilled when the Japanese armies were driven out of Burma. They also found that the people of Burma looked upon Japanese military occupation as even worse than anything they had experienced under British rule.⁵⁵ The Burmese went through many hardships and sufferings during the three years of Japanese military rule. Burma suffered cruelly. But the suffering was, in one way, a blessing in disguise. People were able to gain a number of new experiences. The period of three years appeared like centuries to them.

52. Traeger, *Burma: Japanese Military Administration*, p. 1.

53. *Ibid.*

54. Johnstone, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

55. Slim, *op. cit.*, p. 519.

The Burmese welcomed the Japanese as liberators but they were rightly surprised and disappointed to find them behaving like conquerors. "The Japanese occupation of Burma was for the Burmese like the ordeal by fire from which an alchemist in Burmese folk-lore emerged with youth and vigour restored."⁵⁶

The Japanese rule in Burma aroused the national spirit of the people. It set their patriotism afire. The people encouraged the boys in the Army and offered their all for the great cause of freedom. Burma had never been so united in history. People looked determined to achieve their independence or die. The Japanese became alarmed at the great and general awakening among the Burmese people. They found the Burmese feeling turned against them. Now they could no longer suppress the people with heavy hands.⁵⁷

The Japanese occupation of Burma also contributed to Burmese nationalist developments. Although the residual power always remained in the hands of the Japanese, the Burmese nationalists were given the facade and some of the tangible aspects of sovereignty. Burmans were given the facility to run the country after August, 1942. But they were administratively subject to ultimate Japanese veto-power. The Burmese never found their collaboration with the Japanese as treasonable. They considered it as a means to their goal—the goal of independence. But they soon became aware of the fact that the Japanese did not intend to grant them genuine and real freedom.⁵⁸ The Burmese leaders like Aung San and others were of the view that "made-in-Japan" independence was only a pretension. In August, 1944, Aung San had publicly denounced the Japanese brand of independence.⁵⁹ He and the younger Thakin group of nationalists had become disenchanted

56. Maung Htin Aung, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

57. Maung Maung, "The Resistance Movement", *The Guardian*, Vol. I, No. 5, p. 3.

58. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, pp. 60-61.

59. Johnstone, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.

with Japan's promises and performance for Burma's independence even before it was proclaimed. They were to look forward for new direction in their search for real freedom. Trager rightly observes: "Whatever their individual attitudes towards the Allied Powers and Japan, one fact emerges from all accounts of the period whether written by Westerners, Burmese, or Japanese: the Burmese leaders from the Head of State down were determined to have a meaningful independence whatever the cost."⁶⁰ The question was how and when. A majority of the military and civilian Thakins, therefore, clustered around the leadership of Aung San in their struggle for freedom of Burma.

Brigadier Maung Maung, the Intelligence Officer of Aung San at that time, writes of "impatience among the younger officers in the summer of 1942 and of a long lecture by Aung San admonishing them to be doubly sure of our own strength, the quality and toughness of our own leaders, before rising against the Japanese...All the time...he was getting the young leaders ready, sharpening them, as it were, as tools to wield in the vital struggle that lay ahead."⁶¹ Aung San, after his return from Tokyo sessions of March, 1943, reported privately that Burma's independence would be in name only. He had the experience of the Japanese and clearly saw that they would not be the liberators of Burma. Later on, he negotiated secretly with the Allied Commanders and finally changed sides, bringing with him the Burmese forces which he commanded.⁶²

Burma gained a different administrative experience under the Japanese from what they had under the British after the Act of 1935 which had provided them with a constitution. This constitution functioned in Burma until the country was overrun by the Japanese. The constitution gave power in all important

60. Trager, *Burma: Japanese Military Administration*, p. 18.

61. Maung Maung, comp. and ed., *Aung San of Burma*, The Hague, 1962, pp. 67-78.

62. Philip Nash, "U Aung San", *The Guardian*, Vol. IV, No. 5, p. 2.

matters except defence, foreign relations, and the administration of the hill areas, to Burmese Ministers responsible to a popular legislature. Dorman Smith, the Governor of Burma, was of the view that since 1937 Burma had enjoyed a greater degree of domestic self-government than any other unit of the British Empire with the exception of the self-governing dominions. But under the Japanese, a Burmese Dictator, Ba Maw, was placed at the head of the Government with a Council of Ministers without any legislative organ. The fabric of the pre-invasion administration had been maintained in Burma but always with the presence at the District and the Village Headquarters of a party leader. This party leader was responsible to the Dictator and exercised the real authority. This was largely a facade, behind which the Japanese wielded a dominant authority.⁶³

The independence of Burma, gained by the Japanese in 1943, was held to be invalid and against international law. Even the declaration of war by the Burmese Government against Great Britain and United States was considered void. It was maintained that Burma must be a State and therefore a subject of international law before declaring war on any State.⁶⁴

The economic condition of Burma deteriorated during the Japanese rule. A tight Japanese control over all aspects of the economic life of the country was maintained. It opened the eyes of some of the Burmese leaders. The Japanese Army kept a stronghold on the economic life of Burma. Economic grievances prevailed over all areas of the country, particularly Lower Burma. The Japanese Army took over railway and river communications. There became such an acute shortage of cooking oil in Lower Burma that its price multiplied thirteen times at Rangoon.⁶⁵ Disruption of the internal system of

63. Govt. of India, Dept. of Commonwealth Relations, File No. F. 47-2/44-O.S.

64. Maung Maung, *Burma in the Family of Nations*, p. 101.

65. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 458.

communication isolated large areas and produced widespread economic dislocation.⁶⁶ The breakdown of overseas trade seriously affected Lower Burma and put her into economic stagnation. Large supplies of rice were requisitioned. Thousands of cattle were slaughtered to meet the food requirements of the Japanese Army. A considerable labour force was also organized in Burma by the Japanese Army. About thirty thousand Burmese labourers lost their lives in the construction of "railway of death", being constructed to the south between Burma and Thailand.⁶⁷ The arrival of the supreme Japanese economic adviser, Ogawa, in Burma in early 1944, did not save the situation.⁶⁸

Burmas found only two economic aspects in their favour under the Japanese. The first concerned with Japanese efforts to promote economic self-sufficiency and training of Burmese state scholars in Japan in the fields of banking, engineering, and industrial management. The second favourable aspect was that Upper Burma cultivators could pay their accumulated debts in cheap Japanese currency.⁶⁹

The Burmese Government made futile efforts to remove economic grievances of the people. However, this common misery gave birth to a new unity. It combined all racial and sectional groups into one. It was the building for the first time of a national army which proved to be pivotal to the struggle for independence.⁷⁰

Thus the Japanese rule in Burma had a number of effects on the political and economic development of the country. It also influenced the progress of the independence movement

66. For details, see, James R. Andrus, "Burmese Economy during the Japanese Occupation", in *Burma during the Japanese Occupation*, 2 vols, Simla, 1944, II, pp. 173-181.

67. Johnstone, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

68. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 459.

69. *Ibid.*

70. Furnival, *The Governance of Modern Burma*, p. 23.

and the attitudes of its leaders. The word 'independence' worked like magic on the wishful imaginations of Burman leaders.⁷¹ The period of Japanese military rule lasted only for three years, but the Burmese people considered it more irksome than sixty years of British rule.⁷² There developed gradual disillusionment of these Burman leaders with the Japanese. They turned against their initial liberators. Under the Japanese there was a shift from an anti-British movement to that of an anti-Japanese movement. The Burmese aspirants for independence organized a resistance movement against the Japanese to achieve their goal of freedom.

71. Khin Myo Chit, *Three Years Under the Japanese*, Rangoon, 1945, p. 4.

72. Maung Htin Aung, *A History of Burma*, London, 1967, p. 301.

Disillusionment with Japan and the Rise of Resistance Movement in Burma

The Resistance Movement in Burma occupied a significant place in the freedom struggle of the country. It was an important phase of the nationalist struggle for independence during the Second World War. The nationalist Burma accepted Japan as a helpmate in her attempt to achieve the goal of independence. But the majority of the Burman nationalists found their cherished desire for independence crumbling to pieces under the Japanese. Many of them failed to see any marked difference between the British and Japanese policies regarding the independence of Burma. The Japanese militarists followed in the footsteps of their predecessors by saying that the independence was not practicable during the war. However, the Japanese made lavish promises to make Burma free. But the Burman leaders gradually realized the emptiness of those promises. It was not long before that the people of Burma felt the heavy hand of the Japanese Army. Under the circumstances, Burman leaders soon became disillusioned with Japan and organized the Resistance Movement against the Japanese. With anti-Japanese feelings becoming more intense in Burma, the movement made good headway. Burma rose as one man against the Japanese to achieve the ultimate aim of the historic Resistance Movement.

The Resistance Movement in Burma was the product of a number of factors. The Burmese leadership came to believe in Colonel Suzuki as early as 1942. He had assured that the Japanese really intended to liberate Burma and help to restore her independence. He made it clear that Japan would not deceive the Burmese. But Suzuki himself became disillusioned with the actual Japanese policy imposed on Burma in May and June, 1942. He is reported to have offered Aung San the alternative of rising against Japan. However, Suzuki was removed from Burma in June 1942. The time was not yet ripe for starting the Resistance Movement against the Japanese.¹

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The Burman leaders organized a Resistance Movement because they were denied the genuine independence which the Japanese had promised on their entry into the country. These leaders actually realized that the real independence would only be gained when the Japanese forces were driven out of Burma. The Japanese had been committing many atrocities in Burma, as elsewhere in the East.² Of all the countries under the Japanese occupation Burma suffered worst. One year of occupation was enough to alienate the people of Burma against the Japanese Military. Many of the Burman leaders found that the people in the country were no longer satisfied with the Japanese military rule. Their experience of the Japanese rule provided immense stimulus to their nationalist feelings. "The much vaunted torch of liberation had ceased to burn, if it had existed at all. The 'Asian brotherhood' slogan did not excite any more."³

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The economic grievances of the people under the Japanese increased manifold. Their plight was desperate but the Japanese gave no priority to the measures of promoting economic recovery. The Burmese people believed that the

1. Trager, *Burma: Japanese Military Administration*, p. 17.

2. U So Nyun, "Burma's Place in the World Today", *Burma* (Rangoon), Vol. I, No. 1, p. 6.

3. Maung Maung, *Burma in the Family of Nations*, p. 95.

economic situation in the country would improve only after political independence. During the three years of Japanese military rule, the Burmese faced hardship, suffering and mental agony. Most of the people of Burma welcomed the Japanese soldiers as liberators but they were surprised and disappointed to see them behaving as conquerors. A Burmese, U Kyaw Min, says about the Japanese: "Their very upbringing contained the seeds of their undoing."⁴ Under these circumstances, Burman leaders felt that a Resistance Movement would gain some active support and practically no opposition in the countryside.⁵

The activities and developing organization of the Communists in Burma aggravated the disillusionment of the Burman leaders with the Japanese. The Communists in Burma derived many advantages by the establishment of regular channels of communication with the Communist Party of India (CPI). Their Pe Myint, who held open anti-Japanese views, fled to India shortly after the beginning of the Japanese invasion of Burma. He served as a liaison agent between the British authorities and the anti-Japanese underground in Burma. He developed his connections with the CPI by taking advantage of his position.

Communist Parties in Asia and elsewhere received a direction to do everything for the defeat of the Fascists after the Nazi attack on Russia. The Communists often formed the core of a well-organized underground Resistance Movement in Southeast Asia. Thakin Nu and other Burman leaders received certain important messages from the General Secretary of the CPI, P.C. Joshi.⁶ U Ba Choe was all through strongly pro-Communist. The doctrinaire Communists, Thakin Soe and Their Pe Myint, and the strongly Marxist and afterwards Communist, Thakin Than Tun, appeared anti-Japanese from

4. U Kyaw Min., *op. cit.*, p. 78.

5. Slim, *op. cit.*, p. 510.

6. J.H. Brimmell, *Communism in South East Asia*, New York, 1959, pp. 185 ff.

the very beginning. They were the main leaders of the Burma Revolutionary Party (BRP). The Marxist Socialists of the Thakin group had a dominance over the party.⁷

The first popular expression of concrete Burmese Resistance Movement against the Japanese manifested itself in June, 1944. It took formal political shape as a typical People's Front in August and September, 1944.⁸ But the origin of the Resistance Movement in Burma can be traced back from the very first days of the Japanese occupation. Most of the Burmans, who had contacts with the Japanese invaders, including some responsible leaders of the BIA, had become disillusioned about Japan's promises of independence of Burma even prior to the conclusion of the Japanese conquest of Burma.⁹ Some of the strong opponents of British rule were also more strongly opposed to the Japanese. They went on organizing resistance with the arrival of the Japanese in Burma.

Aung San and his associates had collaborated with Japan to launch the BIA into Burma along with the Japanese armies. They had also urged Japan to recognise the independence of Burma immediately and treat the new nation as an ally in the war. In July 1942, the BIA was disbanded by the order of General Idea, Commander-in-Chief in Burma and the BDA was constituted with Aung San as the Commander of the Army. The Thakins had expectations to realize their objectives through their endeavours in the BIA. But with its dissolution, their hopes were severely curtailed.¹⁰ Donnison, a former Colonel in the British Civil Affairs Service, holds the view: "The BIA had fought against British forces with some bravery and exercised a moral effect... quite out of proportion to its numbers."¹¹ Thus, the dissolution of the BIA served as an element of the Resistance Movement.

7. U Ba Swe, *Guide to Socialism in Burma*, Rangoon, 1959, p. 1.

8. Trager, *Burma from Kingdom to Republic*, p. 62.

9. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 448.

10. Trager, *Burma: Japanese Military Administration*, p. 17.

11. Donnison, *History of the Second World War, British Military Administration in the Far East, 1943-46*, London, 1959, p. 345.

Thakin reaction the Japanese commenced towards the end of 1942. Thakin Mya became aware that the Japanese "train up pupils, but they remain the masters."¹² Ba Maw as the Chief Administrator under the Japanese also resolved to prevent the Japanese from deceiving the Burmese. The Thakin Inner Circle considered that it would be quite useful if some one among them remained inside the Subordinate Burmese Administration set up by the Japanese in August, 1942. Thakin Soe, an individual Marxist, had already gone underground. He preached resistance in the Delta. Thus the trend of Burmese opinion throughout 1942 was clearly opposed to the Japanese.

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, between January and August, 1943, the Japanese Premier, Tojo, arranged to make Burma an independent and allied state. Burma got a constitution. Ba Maw became head of the state, the Adipadi. Aung San was promoted to the rank of Major General and also became War Minister. Ne Win was made Commander of the renamed BNA. Thakins Mya, Nu, Than Tun and others enjoyed various ministerial posts. Burma declared war on the Allies. It was clear by then that the Burmese leaders wanted real independence at any cost. Thus: "around the leadership of Bogyoke Aung San there clustered a majority of the military and civilian Thakins whose names constitute the proud Burmese roster of the resistance."¹³

Aung San was able to derive the support and co-operation to the Resistance Movement from various directions. He was in close contact with the labour leaders of the old Dobama Asiayone and also the subordinate commanders of the BNA. He was capable of influencing his old colleagues in the widespread student movement. Aung San gained the confidence of minority groups also, including the Karen Central Organization in the Delta. This organization had its own separate contacts with the Allied Command in Ceylon.

12. Trager, *Burma from Kingdom to Republic*, p. 61.

13. Trager, *Burma: Japanese Military Administration*, p. 18.

The dissolution of the BIA and the dismissal of Colonel Suzuki marked the beginning of the course of development leading to the Resistance Day on 27 March, 1945. Gradually the forces of resistance were gathered and organized. A Karen Resistance Movement in Burma led by British officers was put down with atrocities. But by the end of 1943, a major part of the Burmese Thakin Party was leading a small but well-organized Resistance Movement against the Japanese. A meeting was held at Than Tun's house to make out plans for the Resistance Movement. Than Tun expected it to be ready by the end of 1943. But events proved that date too optimistic. The reason behind this was that the resistance forces were still scattered and unorganized. As Aung San put it: "our plan was still vague. We had no contacts yet in India and in China. . . . Above all we had to get the people ready, for only with their support could we win."¹⁴

Other secret meetings were organized by the Thakins Inner Circle Group. A meeting was held at Thakin Nu's house. The members of the Thakin Inner Circle, Aung San, Thakin Myn, Thakin Than Tun, and Thakin Chit, attended the meeting. Aung San read out a long proclamation, which he had prepared, entitled "Rise and Attack the Fascist Dacoits!"¹⁵ All present in the meeting agreed with the proposal. It was decided that the proclamation would be printed by the Burmese army. Its copies were to be sent to revolutionaries everywhere for circulation on a wide scale. The BDA associated itself actively with the Resistance Movement from that day onwards.

The reconciliation between Burmans and Karens was an important factor of the Resistance Movement in Burma. "In this matter General Aung San and Thakin Than Tun were especially energetic."¹⁶ Initially the Burmans were doubtful of

14. Aung San, "The Resistance Movement" in *Burma's Challenge*, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

15. U Nu, *U Nu, Saturday's Son*, p. 110.

16. Thakin Nu, *Burma Under the Japanese*, pp. 98 ff.

Karen allegiance to the nationalist cause. Some Burmans had offended the feelings of Karens in the Delta. So they had resentment against the Burmans. Conciliation meetings took place in Rangoon and in the Delta. Thakin Than Tun was most industrious in this regard. He along with the other Thakin leaders regretted the behaviour of some Thakins with Karens. They pleaded that it happened because there was no one to keep the Thakins under control when the Thakin leaders were in jail. They asked the Karens to give up their mutual ill-feeling as the safety of the country lay in unity. The Thakins were prepared to make all efforts for gaining the favour of the Karens.

The Thakin leaders gradually gained the confidence of the Karens and stimulated them to participate in a common resistance against Japan. Aung San offered Hanson Kya Doe, a Sandhurst trained Karen officer, and San Po Thin, a Karen musician and bandmaster, to join the BNA. The former became the commander of a battalion of newly recruited Karens. The Thakins communicated with one of the British officers, Major H.P. Seagrim, through this unit. Seagrim had stayed behind in Burma after the British evacuation. He had established radio contact with the British forces in India in October, 1943. In November 1943, the Karen assistant of Seagrim, Po Hla, an officer in the Burma Rifles, brought news from the Karens in the Burma Defence Army that the Burmese leaders were organizing a revolt against the Japanese. This information was "the first intimation India (the British Force 136) received of the rebellious frame of mind of the (sic) BDA... was sent by Seagrim in November, 1943."¹⁷ Force 136 had already made contact with a small group of communist Thakins in Burma who had gone underground in the spring of 1942. The British Intelligence Force 136 realized that the Burmese communists had genuinely become more anti-Axis than anti-British. But the official Allied decision to co-operate with the Burmese Resistance was made only after Mountbatten took command

17. Ian Morrison, *Grandfather Longlegs, The Life and Gallant Death of Major H.P. Seagrim*, London, 1947, pp. 112-113.

in 1943.¹⁸ Thus, Southeast Asia Command (SEAC), formed in 1943 under Mountbatten, began to be aware of mainline Burmese resistance efforts.

Mountbatten made efforts to resolve the differences between Force 136 and the Civil Affairs Service (CAS). The CAS was hostile to the Thakins. It regarded Aung San "with the gravest suspicion and disinclined to enter into any arrangements for cooperation with them."¹⁹ C.F.B. Pearce, Chief Civil Affairs Officer (Burma), was of the view that the further issue of arms to the BDA would endanger the present and future security of Burma. The BDA had, however, well equipped itself with some modern arms which they had either gathered on battlefields or received from the Japanese. Still, it was not adequately well armed to face fully-equipped regular troops. Force 136 had been supplying additional arms to the BDA as it intended to take part in the campaign on the side of the British. The Commander of the Force 136 had the view that a strengthened guerilla movement in Burma would be helpful in his own operations behind the enemy lines.²⁰ Fortunately for Burma, Aung San had developed a relationship of mutual respect and friendship with William Slim and Mountbatten. Both Mountbatten and Slim decided to co-operate with Aung San and the BNA. As part of his preparations for reconquest of Burma in early 1944, Mountbatten decided to encourage growing anti-Japanese sentiment, not only among the hill people and the Delta Karens, but also within the anti-Fascist Movement that was emerging within the government of Ba Maw.

1944 was the crucial year so far as the organization of the Burmese Resistance Movement was concerned. The year

18. June Bingham, *U Thant of Burma*, London, 1966, p. 155.

19. Donnison, *History of the Second World War, British Military Administration in the Far East, 1943-46*, p. 348.

20. Vice-Admiral The Earl Mountbatten of Burma, *Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff by the Supreme Allied Commander*, New Delhi, 1960, p. 143.

also marked the first anniversary of Burma's Independence under Japan in August. The young officers were openly organizing for Resistance by the beginning of 1944. Aung Gyi, Tin Pe, Chit Khine, Aye Maung, and Ye Htut were prominent among them. They were serving with units in the field. Thakin Soe, a strong communist, pledged that he would place the Resistance first and give up ideology in the common struggle. He would agree to have one front under one leader.²¹

A conference of the Resistance leaders was held on 1 August, 1944. The Thakin Party along with the others had merged in the national front of the Resistance. Now a name was to be selected to cover the united parties. It came to be known as the AFPFL.²² This national organization was first called the Anti-Fascist Organization (AFO). The AFPFL was organized largely through the efforts of the anti-Japanese Thakin leaders both within and outside the government. But it opened its ranks to all the peoples of Burma, irrespective of their ethnic group, religion or political beliefs. This typical people's front consisted of the BRP; the Burma Communist Party (BCP); various non-Marxist political groups; some trade unions; various women's, youth, ethnic and Buddhist organizations; and, most significantly the BNA. Aung San was the popular choice as the leader of the party. The Manifesto²³ of the party asked for armed resistance against the Fascist Japan. It demanded a democratic constitution for independent Burma under a people's Government. It also offered guidelines for social insurance and welfare. The Manifesto called for progressive policies in education, agriculture, industry, the judiciary, and other administrative fields. But it was quiet on the future of the Burmese armed forces.²⁴

The youthful Thakins Aung San and Than Tun were the

21. Maung Maung, *Burma's Constitution*, p. 64.

22. Maurice Collis, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

23. For the text of the Manifesto of the AFPFL see Maung Maung Pye, *Burma in the Crucible*, Rangoon, 1951, pp. 177-83.

24. *Ibid.*

main architects and leaders of the AFPFL. They were holder and more reckless than their nther associates. Both of them were men of great integrity and unquestionable dedication to nationalist cause. Other important members of the party were Bo Ne Win, Bo Let Ya, Saw Kya Doe, Thakin Soe, Thakin Chit, U Kyaw Nyein and U Ba Swe.²⁵

The BNA, under the able leadership of Aung San, came to be associated with the Resistance Movement in a definite way. It became the hope of the country and people rendered their active support to it. The hot-blooded young officers in the BNA tried to expand it and make it popular. They read literature of revolutionary struggles and resistance movements. Treatises on guerilla warfare were translated by them. They drafted their plans and programmes.²⁶ A nationalist orientation within the army had already started in early 1944. The Burmese people had full faith in Aung San and the BNA. He and the army turned to be the nucleus of the Resistance Movement.

The Resistance Movement in Burma was now prepared both politically and militarily. The AFPFL and the BNA were its two main aspects. Burmese military detachments were already flexing their muscles against the Japanese towards the end of 1944 and the beginning of 1945. Reports of risings came from the Arakan at the end of 1944. There the Arakanese, Nyo Tun, helped by a former monk, Pyinnya Thiha, inflicted a hit-and-run attack on the Japanese. British Force 136 Headquarters in India received the news through its agents in Burma on 1 January, 1945, that the BNA was preparing to fight the Japanese with some 8,000 troops. It was also reported that the Burmese had managed for reception committees to receive the intelligence teams of Force 136.

By January 1945, Japanese army forces in Burma had been increased from one army of five divisions, consisting of a

25. Maung Maung, *Burma's Constitution*, p. 65.

26. *Ibid*, p. 62.

total of about 135,000 men, to two armies of eight divisions and one independent mixed brigade, making a total of some 200,000 men.²⁷ On 18 February, 1945, the Commander of Force 136, requested Mountbatten to review an order by Lieutenant-General Leese banning any further supply of arms to the BDA. The BDA was virtually the military component of the AFO, the main Resistance Movement in Burma. Mountbatten rightly observes: "The AFO was a loosely coordinated "popular front" of the active Resistance parties, mainly of the Left..."²⁸ Many of its members had actively and even illegally opposed the Government of Burma before the war. Some of them had collaborated with the Japanese also during the occupation.

The Secretary of State for Burma, Amery, had made a statement in the House of Commons on 12 December, 1944 on the policy of the Government regarding Burma. He stated that the British Government would abide by her promise to accord Burma complete self-government as soon as possible. But he clarified that he was not in a position to make a more precise statement until the liberation of Burma had made further progress and the course of events was more clear. A more detailed statement of His Majesty's Government's policy with regard to Burma was made in the House of Commons, in future, on 17 May, 1945. Meanwhile, the political situation in Burma had taken a turn. Many sections of the population had started Resistance against the Japanese. Fortunately, Mountbatten had also received the approval of the War Cabinet to support the Burmese Resistance Movement.²⁹ He formally recognized and supported this movement.

Force 136 reacted favourably and sent in Burma as many wireless teams as possible to collect and send back operational intelligence. The idea was to prepare the way for the subsequent reception of Jedburgh teams, which would organize

27. Mountbatten, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 142-143.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 199-200.

and raise guerrillas. One Jedburgh team included two British officers and a wireless operator. They relied on local defence forces for their security.³⁰ The plan of the Force 136 was to act with the AFPFL and the BNA under the code name Nation.

Aung San, who had lost his faith in the Japanese and made contact with the Resistance Movement, had been trying vainly to get the cooperation of the British military authorities from 1943. However, he succeeded in obtaining their support towards the end of 1944. The British troops fought their way back into Burma in the early months of 1945.³¹ Two BNA officers at Mandalay, Majors Ba Htu and Akiawaka, started attacking the Japanese in Mandalay. They had the knowledge of the advances of the 14th Army under General Slim across the Chindwin River and on to the Shwebo plain. It was explained to the Japanese in Rangoon that this was a random act. The Japanese sanctioned additional arms to the eight infantry battalions of the BNA at the request of Aung San for fighting against the enemy.

In March 1945, Aung San and the BNA deserted the Japanese and went over to the side of the British. Aung San surprised the Japanese by successfully transferring all his forces in favour of the Allies. It was really a turning-point in the Resistance Movement. Ever since the middle of 1944, the Burmese people were aware of the fact that the possibility of ultimate Japanese victory in the war had diminished. They genuinely realized that nothing could be achieved towards their goal of independence by cooperating with the Japanese. By that time the Thakins had been totally disillusioned with the Japanese. The BNA had also turned against the Japanese. Practically, almost the whole of Burma had actually become anti-Japanese.³² The hollowness of the independence given by

30. S. Woodburn Kirby ed., *India's Most Dangerous Hour*, Vol. 4, London, 1966, p. 33.

31. Furnivall, *The Governance of Modern Burma*, p. 19.

32. U Kyaw Min, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

Japan was now clear to everyone in Burma. Not only the Army but the people in Burma were prepared to rise and resist the Japanese. They were behind the Army, and the Army had its hero and leader in Aung San. It was a unique time in the history of Burma when people came together and became one. The country was never so united any time before.³³

On 17 March, 1945, BNA troops paraded before Ba Maw and General Sakurai in Rangoon. Aung San, in a brief address to them, asked them to go and fight the enemy. But he did not mention the name of the enemy. The main contingents of the BNA, consisting of 10,000 men, left Rangoon for the 'front'. Before his departure from Rangoon on March 23, 1945, to join the BNA troops, Aung San pledged to fight for the country. Speaking on behalf of the Army at the send-off ceremony on 17 March, 1945, Major General Aung San, War Minister, said :

Our army will fight for the benefit of the country and if needs be, we will offer ourselves as the very bulwarks against the attacks of the enemy. We will fight the enemy with all the strength in our possession. Unless we can drive the enemy away from our country, and unless we can beat him decisively, our freedom will always be in jeopardy. Let us therefore advance, so that the prosperity of our children will be secured.³⁴

In an interview, Aung San expressed the view that they would return back with the news of victory. He also sent a letter to Ba Maw, which was never delivered, indicating that "We shall have to be prepared to struggle alone for sometime. But I have every confidence that our cause will win ultimately. War or no war, peace or no peace, the struggle for our

33. Maung Maung, *Burma and General Ne Win*, p. 137.

34. "Major General Aung San Pledges to Fight for Country; Greater Asia, Rangoon, March 20, 1945, Document III", in Josef Silverstein, compiled, *The Political Legacy of Aung San*, New York, 1972, p. 20.

national independence must go on until it ends in Victory."³⁵ Aung San proceeded to his field headquarters west of Thayet. He directed the final stage of the Resistance Movement from there, beginning on 27 March, 1945.

27 March, 1945 is regarded as the 'Resistance Day' in the history of Burma. Aung San led the open general rising against the Japanese militarists on this day. He and most of the 10,000-man BNA marched to fight the 'enemy'. Now the Resistance started all over the country. The Allies had already succeeded in overrunning Mandalay in March 1945. The BNA forces engaged the Japanese in the Toungoo-Pyinmana area; around Prome, and specially in the Delta. The forces were then under the command of Colonel Ne Win. The Japanese evacuation of Rangoon started in the last week of April. The BRP declared the occupation of Rangoon by the Burmese armed forces on 1 May. The British 33 Corps took Toungoo on 22 April. It reoccupied Rangoon on 3 May. Colonel Ne Win personally took over the charge of Burmese forces in Rangoon.³⁶ The BNA forces started attacking Japanese supply and communication services throughout Lower Burma. The Burmese had shown the world that Japan, who was a power among World Powers, had ultimately to suffer bitter defeat. Burma had beaten the Japanese in their own game. The typical Burmese technique of guerrilla fighting largely accounted for their success against the Japanese.³⁷

After it was well known that the BNA were giving valuable help to the Allies, General Aung San left his command headquarters on 6 May, 1945, to meet with General Slim. The meeting between Aung San and Slim was a historic one though it could not take place before 16 May at Meiktila in the confusion of the fighting. The Resistance had claimed

35. Maung Maung, compiled and edited, *Aung San of Burma*, The Hague, 1962, pp. 64-65.

36. Trager, *Burma: Japanese Military Administration*, p. 21.

37. General Ne Win, "Our Fight For Freedom", *The Guardian*, Vol. I, No. 3, p. 11.

great sacrifices from the people of Burma. As Donnison observes : "The resistance fought courageously...suffered severe casualties in full scale operations, were employed for scouting, guerrilla, and flank guard operations."³⁸

However, the military role played by the BNA in the defeat of the Japanese forces was not of much positive value. But strategically the co-operation offered by the Army was both timely and important.³⁹ Its rejection carried the danger that it might turn hostile. The success of the Allies advance upon Rangoon could have been adversely affected in the absence of the support of the BNA. The BNA, under the leadership of Aung San, cooperated with the British in attacking the remnants of the fleeing Japanese troops. When the Allied forces were approaching Rangoon, Ba Maw fled with the retreating Japanese to Moulmein. From there he proceeded to Tokyo and was imprisoned after the Japanese surrender.⁴⁰ Rangoon came under the occupation of the British forces on 5 May, 1945. Now the Resistance against the Japanese came to an end. On 7 May, Colonel Ne Win returned back in Rangoon and broadcast a declaration of war by Burmese against the "Japanese Fascists."⁴¹ The leaders of the AFPFL drafted this declaration.

Aung San emerged as the leader of the Resistance and the architect of Burmese independence. He and his associates kept pace with the general feelings of the people. They came out at the end of the war as national heroes with an energetic popular support behind them. General Slim, after his first meeting with Aung San, describes his qualities as follows: "...I judged him to be a genuine patriot and a well-balanced realist—characters which are not always combined. His experience with the Japanese had put his views on the British into a truer perspective. He was ready himself to cooperate

38. Donnison, *History of the Second World War*, p. 354.

39. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 482.

40. Ba Maw, *op. cit.*, p. 414.

41. Bingham, *op. cit.*, 157.

with us in the liberation and restoration of Burma and, I thought, probably to go on co-operating after that had been accomplished."⁴²

In the context of the Burmese aspirations for freedom and independence, Aung San held the view that there was no alternative before them except to take weapons against the Japanese. They knew it well that the Allied Forces might not help them in time. He asserted: "We got no promises from the Allied Forces nor did we ask for any of them. We fight on their side...because we believe they are heading towards a new world of freedom and peace, only in which our country can have and maintain her freedom in security..."⁴³

Aung San and his associates proceeded to their meetings with William Slim and Mountbatten, and in time to their goal of freedom and independence. Aung San had already become the leader of the military. He now set about organizing the political arm of the Resistance, the AFPFL, and became its leader too. He actually proved to be the charismatic figure of Burma's freedom struggle.⁴⁴

The forces of the Resistance Movement, acting in collaboration with the British and the American Forces, were eventually able to expel the Japanese from Burma in 1945. The British had liberated the whole of Burma by May 1945. The Burmese leaders and the people welcomed the British as friends and colleagues. The commanders and troops of Mountbatten acted as true liberators and treated the Burmese with sympathy and consideration.⁴⁵ The Burmese thereafter renewed their claim to independence.

As indicated earlier, Aung San had met Mountbatten, Commander-in-Chief of the Southeast Asian Allied Forces, and

42. Slim, *op. cit.*, p. 519.

43. Aung San, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

44. Trager, *Burma: Japanese Military Administration*, pp. 21-22.

45. Maung Htin Aung, *op. cit.*, pp. 302-304.

was friendly with him. It was clear that in re-occupying Burma Mountbatten was determined to base his policy "firmly on liberal principles." He made it clear to the people of Burma that the British were not returning "in a punitive spirit, or one of retaliation."⁴⁶ One of the main points of his policy was that the existing laws and regulations, which had already worked efficiently under emergency conditions in Burma, were to remain in force.

After the fall of Rangoon, Mountbatten was strongly urged by some officers of his Civil Affairs Staff to declare the AFPFL illegal and to arrest Aung San as a War Criminal. But he had no intention of providing a minor civil war in Burma. On 15 May, 1945, Mountbatten telegraphed to the Chiefs of Staff that the British had now overrun all BNA units in the field, and asked for their guidance. He advised the Chiefs of Staff for the regularisation of the BNA as it was an organized force, properly recruited and uniformed.⁴⁷ Collis has expressed the view that Mountbatten firmly believed that if he had been given full authority to deal with Aung San, Burma would have remained within the Commonwealth after independence. He observes: "Aung San had cast his spell over Mountbatten."⁴⁸ Field Marshall William Slim has also given a favourable report about Aung San after his meeting with him in the middle of May 1945. Slim at this meeting had expected to exploit Aung San and to make him accept his orders. But strangely enough, during his conversations with Aung San, Slim turned to like and admire him. Slim writes: "I have always felt that with proper treatment, Aung San would have proved a Burmese Smuts."⁴⁹

Although the British leaders accepted Aung San's offer of military resistance against the Japanese, all of them did not favour him or the Resistance. As mentioned earlier, Major

46. Mountbatten, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

48. Maurice Collis, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

49. Quoted in Trager, *Burma: Japanese Military Administration*, p. 23.

General Pearce regarded the Resistance and particularly Aung San with the gravest suspicion. He disliked any co-operation with Aung San and the Thakin nationalists. Churchill, as wartime Prime Minister and subsequently the leader of the opposition, considered Aung San as the "traitor rebel leader" of a "quisling army".⁵⁰ Hugh Tinker regards Aung San with "prejudice", and accuses him of acting "treacherously."⁵¹ Christopher Sykes, in his biography of Orde Wingate, refers to Aung San as "a jackalish youth in Japanese employ."⁵²

But happily for Burma at that time, the more informed British heads prevailed upon the critics of Aung San and the Resistance Movement. Aung San definitely had a great ambition to see Burma and her people free and independent. He joined with the Japanese initially with the end in view. However, soon he became disillusioned with the Japanese promises and initiated the historic Resistance Movement during the last years of the Japanese occupation and led the political campaign that subsequently facilitated the achievement of independence. Freedom from the tyrannical rule of Japan and the desire for genuine independence was the central concern which dominated throughout the period of the Resistance Movement. Aung San and his associates organized a mass movement and held mass rallies all over the country. The Burmese press and propaganda also co-operated with Aung San by advertising all his moves.⁵³ Thus, Aung San became at the end of the war the focus of nationalist aspirations which found expression in the broad based AFPFL.

The Thakins played a decisive role in making the Resistance Movement a success. A series of situations combined to place the young Thakins at the head of the Resistance Movement against the Japanese. They co-operated with the Allied armies as they drove the Japanese out of Central Burma

50. Donnison, *History of the Second World War*, pp. 369-370.

51. Hugh Tinker, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

52. Christopher Sykes, *Orde Wingate*, New York, 1959, p. 403.

53. Trager, *Burma: Japanese Military Administration*, p. 24.

in the race to Rangoon.⁵⁴ Allied victory would have been far more costly and less conclusive without the timely Burmese assistance. It was mainly the Thakin element in Burmese politics that, under the Japanese, had brought the BNA and the AFPFL to the forefront. Mountbatten believed that the AFPFL reflected the dominance of Burmese nationalist sentiment. He, therefore, accepted the co-operation of the Burmese Anti-Fascist Army during the concluding months of the Burma campaign as allies against the common enemy.⁵⁵ The Burmese people welcomed liberation from the Japanese rule, but they turned to be impatient of any form of foreign rule as will be examined in the next chapter.

Thus, the Resistance Movement in Burma constituted a determining phase in the freedom struggle of the country. It not only led to significant political developments but also marked the growth of impatient nationalism in Burma. The AFPFL emerged as the predominant political organization claiming the support of the Burmese nation as a whole.⁵⁶ The Resistance Movement brought the country to the threshold of independence. Now the struggle for independence in Burma shifted from the battlefield to the political arena. The stage was set for a rift between the British and the Burmans with regard to the future of Burma.

54. Johnstone, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

55. Cady, *The United States and Burma*, pp. 169-70.

56. Aung San and the AFPFL appeared as the most potent political force with which the British authorities had to deal with in the post-war period.

Conflict and Confrontation between the British and the Burmans

The end of the Japanese rule and the British reoccupation of Burma opened a new chapter in the freedom struggle of the country. The postwar period witnessed rapid nationalist developments in Burma. It marked the growth of impatient nationalism for the gaining of independence. The Burman leaders laid stress on complete independence for their country and full sovereignty from Britain. There was wide disagreement between the British and the Burmese nationalists over the pathway to independence from October 1945 to August 1946. The British had not advanced Burma along the way to independence before the war. The initial postwar British political and economic policies in Burma fell far short of the demands of the Burmese nationalists. The British aimed at economic recovery in Burma before granting eventual dominion status to her. It was clear in 1945 that the British Government had postponed to an indefinite future any possible agreement with the Burmese nationalists about self-government or dominion status. The British authorities in London failed to appreciate fully a new sense of Burman national solidarity that had been born from the common experience of wartime sufferings. Thus the divergence between the official British and the Burman nationalist

points of view became quite evident in the second half of 1945.

Aung San and the AFPFL were of great importance in the freedom struggle of postwar Burma. They carried out a vigorous drive for recognition in the short interval period between the end of hostilities and the return of the British Burma Government from Simla in October 1945. The AFPFL represented virtually every political opinion group in the country, including most of the minority peoples, by early May 1945.¹ It claimed that it was not a party, nor even a coalition merely, but a 'National Government'.² The British Government was not ready to take seriously Aung San's views that he did not like British or Japanese or any other foreigners to rule his country.³ The Supreme Council of the AFPFL was broadened in May 1945 to include more groups of nationalists. Thus "it was on the basis of this broadened affiliation, backed by several mass organizations and, by actual military participation throughout the final months of the Burma campaign, that the AFPFL put forward its claim to speak for the Burmese nation."⁴ Mounthatten's support to the AFPFL clearly strengthened its position, both politically and militarily.

Dorman-Smith's exiled Burma Government at Simla was entrusted with the task of planning for postwar administration of the country as early as August 1942. It also included various Burman officials who had escaped Burma with the British in 1942. Initially Dorman-Smith was sympathetic towards Burma's aspiration for freedom. He considered himself as a true friend of Burma and was concerned to make good Britain's failure to protect the country from invasion. He believed that public opinion in Burma would welcome a temporary British reoccupation.

The Burma Sub-Committee of the Conservative Imperial

1. Butwell, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

2. Maung Maung, *Burma's Constitution*, p. 70.

3. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 63.

4. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 484.

Affairs Committee was set up in November 1943 to consider the future of Burma in the light of the probable conditions which would prevail after the reoccupation of the country by Great Britain. The report of the committee was to be placed before Amery, the Secretary of State for Burma. The committee envisaged a period of reconstruction in Burma before any new constitution could be brought into operation with any success. It recommended that when Burma would be fully-re-occupied, there must be a period of reconstruction of fixed duration. During this period authority would rest with the Governor. A council of representative Burmese would advise and assist the Governor in the work of reconstruction. The future constitution would establish in Burma full self-government and confer Dominion Status subject to the conclusion of a Treaty between the Imperial Government and the Burmese Government. The period of reconstruction and of making the necessary arrangements for the establishment of self-governing institutions was not to exceed five years.⁵ Dorman-Smith warned the committee that it would be highly dangerous to dismiss Burmese nationalism as something of no account. The committee further maintained that during the post-war period every effort should be made to carry the goodwill of Burmans in the task of reconstruction, even to the extent of taking political risks. The reoccupation of Burma would be a military operation, and military considerations would be supreme. The committee urged that so far as might be practicable civil administration would follow close upon the liberating forces.⁶

Burman members of the exiled British Government at Simla, in cooperation with selected British members, stressed that the basic need was to find an effective basis for postwar cooperation. They clarified that the Burmese must themselves share responsibility for formulating their future constitution. They must also play an active role in determining economic

5. Govt. of India, Deptt. of Commonwealth Relations, File No. F. 47-2/44-o.s.

6. *Ibid.*

policies. However, the British Government throughout the war period showed unwillingness to undertake the task of formulating a new policy regarding Burma's political future. It was a matter of low priority at that time.⁷

Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander for Southeast Asia, had a deciding influence during the course of the reconquest of Burma. He was inclined to encourage growing anti-Japanese sentiment within the anti-fascist movement. His main concern was to defeat the Japanese. He gave only secondary consideration to the possible effects of his actions on still unformulated plans of Simla or Loodoo for the postwar period. Mountbatten even disregarded the protest of his own Civil Affairs Section Burma (CASB), which was headed by General Pearce. The CASB denounced the AFPFL as a treasonable and communist-sponsored organization and was not in favour of giving political recognition to it as a *de facto* British ally.⁸

The final decision of Mountbatten on 27 March, 1945 to grant allied status to Aung San's BNA was not very popular at Simla. It gained the approval of London on 30 March. Mountbatten assured the AFPFL leaders that their cooperation to the Allies both militarily and in civil reconstruction would later be taken into account. But London gave little importance to the AFPFL military contribution. Britain was not ready to discuss with Aung San or any other nationalist leader issues concerning the future political institutions of Burma. On the other hand Britain "would insist that the political progress of Burma within the Commonwealth could only be achieved by unity and discipline under British leadership."⁹ Thus the British governmental authorities were divided among themselves in deciding policy with regard to postwar Burma.

7. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 487.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 501-502.

9. *Ibid*

The British Government's statement of policy towards Burma was published as a 'White Paper' on 17 May, 1945. It was based on the plans prepared by exiled Burma government in Simla. It admitted that all parties in Burma were united in demanding further constitutional advance. The Government's declared policy towards Burma was, and had consistently been, to assist her political development up to Dominion Status.¹⁰ Burma was to be under direct rule of the Governor for a period that would probably not exceed three years and might be less. During this period the Burmese would be associated with the administration in executive and legislative capacities. In the next stage the 1935 constitution was to be re-established. A second phase in constitutional development would begin during which the ground was to be prepared for the attainment of full self-government. At the same time the necessary measures for the restoration of Burma's economy would continue and her financial position would progressively develop towards a standard of self-sufficiency. During this period an election was to be held and the representatives of the Burmese people were to draw up a constitution of a type which they would themselves consider most suitable for Burma. After the completion of these arrangements, full self-government within the British Commonwealth could be established in Burma. The administration of the scheduled areas would be excluded from these arrangements for a considerable period of time.¹¹

The second reading of the Government of Burma Bill, implementing the White Paper proposals, was given in the House of Commons on 1 June, 1945. Amery pointed out that the object of the Bill was to provide for transition from the present military administration to the restoration of the wide measure of self-government enjoyed by Burma before the Japanese invasion, and then to full and complete Dominion Status. He declared that the Government intended that there should be no obstruction or delay in enabling Burma to obtain

10. Govt. of India, External Affairs Deptt., File No. 427-C.A./45 (Secret)-1945.

11. *Ibid.*

the goal of her legitimate aspirations. He expressed the hope that the Bill would be regarded as non-controversial, and a token of British goodwill to the Burmese people.¹²

The AFPFL Council rejected the terms of the White Paper in its first policy statement on 25 May, 1945. It expressed the view that nothing short of political independence would be acceptable to Burma's postwar mood. The Burma White Paper revealed clearly how far wartime Britain had become out of touch with actual political situation in Burma. "The basic misconception which seemed to underline the logic of 'White Paper' on Burma...was that the returning British authorities would be welcomed by a chastened Bormese populatioo, grateful for deliverance against the Japanese."¹³ The White Paper was looked down upon as political retrogression rather than progress toward independence. The AFPFL discarded it as it was regressive. Thus it appeared that the White Paper contained no concessions to Burmese oationaalist demaods. The League was even not prepared to return to the political status prior to the Japaoese invasion.¹⁴ There was a very wide gap between the White Paper policy and the demands of the AFPFL. Burma expected every respectable nation to uphold her political aspirations. The AFPFL was of the view that the drafting of a new constitutioo should be entrusted to a popularly elected Assembly as soon as war cooditions allowed to do so. Meanwhile, the League agreed to cooperate with the British authorities for the time being in expelling Japaoese forces, restoring order, and rehabilitating the economy.¹⁵

Dorman-Smith came to Rangoon harbour and invited representatives of the various political parties of Burma to a meeting held on 20 June, 1945. Among the Burmese leaders, Aung San, Thakin Than Tun, Sir Paw Tun, U Tin Tut, U Pu, U Ba Pe, U Ba Than, Sydney Loo-Nee, U Aye, and U Set

12. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, Vol. IV, London, p. 7258A.

13. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 505.

14. Butwell, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

15. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 510.

attended the conference. Dorman-Smith explained to them the proposals for Burma's future constitutional status contained in the British White Paper. He tried to gain their favour by assuring them that the period of direct rule would be less than three years. He urged them to assist him in the government of the country when civil government would be restored. He explained that executive posts would be offered to them.¹⁶

Dorman-Smith also stated that he could not say exactly when the civil government would take over from the Military Administration. He declared that Britain had no intention of sending the Governor back in Burma in order to establish the old regime. He was being sent back to set up a new regime under which Burma would be completely self-governing. The new regime was to be set up without unnecessary delay. He expressed the view that before self-government could be attained, Burma must have a freely-elected legislature with a Council of Ministers. Dorman-Smith, who left Rangoon on 21 June, 1945, announced that during his absence Hughes would remain in Burma as his personal adviser. Press reports revealed that Dorman-Smith's statement had created a most favourable impression among the Burmese leaders. They regarded it as a great advance on the White Paper.¹⁷

But these proposals failed to take into account the AFPFL as the real representative of Burmese public opinion. The proposals of Dorman-Smith gave less power than the Burmese had enjoyed before the Japanese occupation. They were not acceptable to Aung San and the AFPFL as the Governor refused to recognize the League representing the people of Burma. The AFPFL claimed itself to be the provisional government of the country. It was mainly concerned with converting it into the recognized lawful government of the country within the shortest possible time. The League found the White Paper policy quite slow for them as it put Burma further back constitutionally than she had been in 1939. The

16. W.S. Desai, *A Pageant of Burmese History*, p. 274.

17. *Keessing's Contemporary Archives*, op. cit., p. 7505A.

AFPFL believed that political freedom without economic independence was not of much value. Hence they decided to oppose the return of foreign business interests to the country. They feared that British economic interests once re-established would not be dislodged easily afterwards.¹⁸

Aung San asked his subordinates to be prepared to fight the British again for achieving the independence of Burma if necessary. The communists within his AFPFL's ranks also held the same view. The Marxist too believed that the imperialists could be driven out from any colonial territory only by use of force. But the Thakin group under the leadership of Aung San was not rigid in its policies and actions towards the British. It was mainly because the Burman independence leaders were accorded liberal treatment by Mounthatten. Mounthatten was determined "that no section of the Burmese people should be able to claim that we were returning to the country in a spirit of revenge or reprisal."¹⁹ He considered that Great Britain's traditional policy of leniency and conciliation would be useful to gain the confidence of Aung San and the Thakins. It would facilitate the British to fulfil the objective of eventual self-government in Burma within the Commonwealth. He pleaded that the AFO leaders should now be treated as the legitimate, although yet unofficial, representatives of the bulk of the people.²⁰

Aung San was favourably impressed by the sincerity and straightforward behaviour of Mounthatten and his main subordinates. His confidence in the British had increased. He was persuaded that his goal of independence could be achieved by peaceful agreement rather than by use of violent means. It was under these circumstances that Aung San was ready to place his army, renamed the Burma Patriotic Force (BPF), under

18. Donnison, *Burma*, pp. 130-31.

19. Johnston, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

20. Vice Admiral the Earl Mountbatten of Burma, *Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff by the Supreme Commander, Southeast Asia*, London, 1951, pp. 144, 201-202.

British command. He even agreed later to the disbandment of the BPF after the Japanese surrender.²¹ Militarily, the Southeast Asian Command, under Mountbatten and later Slim, was entrusted to incorporate a portion of the BNA in the regular Burma Army and to disband the rest. Aung San met with General Slim on 16 May, 1945 and with Admiral Mountbatten on 10 June to work out the details of this policy. He wrote a letter to Supreme Allied Commander on 14th June regarding the conversion of the BNA to Burma Army. Aung San pleaded to reorganize the BNA first on an infantry basis fully equipped and complete in every respect. He also asked for opening a training centre for officers, NCO and troops as soon as possible. Steps were to be taken to bring together the BNA, other Burmese troops and others selected from various quarters as necessary, into one common body for maximum efficiency.²²

Disbanding of the old army and re-enlistment in the new, now renamed the Patriotic Burmese Forces (PBF), started at the end of June 1945. But the changeover did not take place smoothly. The British wanted to re-enlist the PBF members on an individual basis whereas the Burmese liked it on a unit basis.²³ Aung San and the AFPFL leadership prepared a memorandum on the principles to be followed in reorganizing the Burma Army. It provided a basis for the Burmese negotiations with the Supreme Allied Commander when they met to discuss army organization in September 1945. Aung San, the commander of the PBF, was of the view that the immediate objective of the reorganization of army was to enable the people of Burma to make the maximum contribution towards the war effort of the Allies. It had certain long term objectives

21. *Ibid*, pp. 202-203.

22. "Letter from Aung San to Supreme Allied Commander Regarding Conversion of BNA to Burma Army; Defence Services Historical Research Institute, Rangoon, Burma, Document IV", in Josef Silverstein, compiled, *The Political Legacy of Aung San*, New York, 1972, p. 21.

23. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 69.

too. The first was to afford Burmans ample opportunities for service in His Majesty's Armed Forces. Secondly it enabled the Burmese nation to participate in the present war against Japan and in future wars entered into by Burma. Its third objective was to provide for Burma a trained and efficient nucleus for the Defence Forces which she would need as a fully self-governing member of the British Commonwealth of Nations.²⁴ However, at least 3,500 armed BNA soldiers never appeared at any dishandment centre. These men were to constitute the nucleus of Aung San's military threat in the future political struggle.²⁵

The British commanders found Aung San "most cooperative."²⁶ Aung San expressed his desire that "Burma should enter the British Commonwealth of Nations, if the full right of our nation to independence is recognized."²⁷ Aung San and his associates, however, realized correctly that Mountbatten might influence British policy but he could not dictate. He had already given recognition to Aung San and the AFPFL without getting formal approval from London.

Mountbatten's relations with the AFPFL leaders remained on the footing of mutual trust and understanding during the period of military administration in Burma from June to October 1945. The actual initiative in Burma lay with the military commanders Mountbatten and Hubert Rance till

24. "Memorandum on the Proposed Reorganization of Burma Patriotic Forces; Defence Services Historical Research Institute, Rangoon, Burma, Document V", in Josef Silverstein, compiled, *The Political Legacy of Aung San*, p. 23.

25. Aung San created the People's Volunteer Organization (PVO) out of the ex-BNA soldiers who had not reported at disbandment centres, which also included various guerrilla type forces. This actually became the AFPFL army under Aung San's command in the final struggle for independence.

26. Slim, *op. cit.*, pp. 519-20.

27. Aung San, *op. cit.*, Presidential Address at the Second Session, Supreme Council, AFPFL.

October 1945. Military Government took cognizance of widespread support of masses behind Aung San and the AFPFL. Meanwhile, Churchill's government was defeated in Britain in July 1945 in the general election and Attlee became the Prime Minister. The implementation of the White Paper programme was rendered somewhat less arbitrary due to the liberal views and policies of Attlee. There was a controversy between Mountbatten and Dorman-Smith during the military administration regarding the proper attitude towards the AFPFL and its leaders. Certain officers of the CAS advised Mountbatten to declare the AFPFL an illegal body, and treat Aung San as a war criminal. But Mountbatten did not agree with this view.²⁸ Mountbatten offered Aung San a major general's commission in the British army in September 1945. But he declined the offer saying that he had decided to confine himself to politics. Mountbatten insisted that world confidence in Britain's good faith in promising fair treatment and restoration of self-government must not be betrayed.

The military administration in Burma generally performed its tasks successfully. Its main function was to re-establish law and order and restore the normal conditions of living. It put the port of Rangoon in working order. It had partially patched up the communications and transport network of the country.²⁹ Its chief concern was to bring back the conditions under which the re-establishment of a civil government on the old footing might be possible as early as possible. But efforts to obtain and distribute much-needed civilian supplies were hampered. New British currency was substituted for the cancelled Japanese currency. This step left the cultivators everywhere without funds. They were likely to be exploited by the money-lenders.³⁰ During the British Military Government in Burma little could be accomplished to restore routine governmental operations. The shortage of consumer goods raised prices by four to five times over pre-war levels.

28. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 512.

29. Johnstone, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

30. Bingham, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

Disorderly conditions prevailed in the countryside, increased by the availability of arms of all varieties.

Meanwhile Dorman-Smith and his senior civil officers began to press for the transfer of power to civil government in Burma. But Mounthatten wanted the military administration to continue till the end of 1945 with a view to complete the essential task of reconstruction of Burma. He felt that the return of civil government at that stage would be premature. There were large numbers of Japanese troops still to be disarmed. But Dorman-Smith pressed hard for the return of the civil administration and Mounthatten was unable to resist him for long.³¹

British Military Government gave way to the Civil Administration in October 1945. The military administration was withdrawn from Burma on 16 October, 1945 when the Governor, Dorman-Smith, returned to Rangoon from Simla to take over the responsibility for the administration of Burma. The long exile was at an end. The beginning of mutual trust between the AFPFL leaders and the military administration was replaced by growing mutual suspicion and hostility soon after the restoration of civil government in Burma. The conflict between the AFPFL and the Governor had already started. "Impatient nationalism, and the conservative and cautious political aims of the Governor came to a head-on collision soon after the military administration was withdrawn."³² The Governor was to face the opposition of the AFPFL from the very beginning of his civil rule. "The fight was not over, as he had said and hoped, it was just beginning."³³

On 17 October, 1945, the Governor read a message of greeting and sympathy to the Burmese people from His Majesty the King. On the next day, he broadcast a message

31. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 516.

32. Maung Maung, *Burma in the Family of Nations*, p. 105.

33. Maung Maung, *Burma and General Ne Win*, p. 172.

from Attlee which stated that although Burma had been cruelly oppressed by the Japanese and had suffered great material damage, she had not lost her soul. It promised rapid progress in restoring the prosperity of Burma and self-government within the Commonwealth. He pointed out that as soon as orderly elections could be arranged, a representative government responsible to the electorate would be empowered to carry out plans for a new constitution. The Governor on arrival in Burma tried to make the best of the situation. He said in his own speech, "Burma will—no longer 'may'—take her place among the full self-governing nations.... Burma's battle for freedom is over. But the first step had to be an election."³⁴ This speech created a favourable impression among the moderates. *The Rangoon Liberator* in a leading article said "We do not hesitate to call it perhaps the most important public statement ever made by a Governor of Burma."³⁵

Dorman-Smith, however, failed to gain the support of the AFPFL leaders. The apprehensions of these leaders could not be removed. Aung San expressed the view: "Dominion status within the British Commonwealth is associated in our minds with inferiority and alien things. We must be free to make our own decision about our future."³⁶ Aung San offered the cooperation of Burma to the British as an independent nation. But Dorman-Smith refused his offer. Thus the relations between Dorman-Smith and the AFPFL deteriorated considerably during the next six months.³⁷ An attitude of mutual suspicion and conflict developed between them. It almost diminished the hope of any effort for cooperation between them. As mentioned earlier, the initial demand of the AFPFL for their recognition as the provisional government of Burma had been turned down. At that time the AFPFL leaders

34. Maurice Collis, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 256.

36. *New Burma in the New World*, Rangoon, 1946; containing speeches of Aung San, Press interviews, AFPFL statements and manifestoes (page not mentioned).

37. Butwell, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

believed that an agreement could be reached with the British for independence.

Governor Dorman-Smith's initial efforts to reach agreement with the AFPFL leaders over composition of the Governor's Executive Council proved futile in October 1945. Aung San, with a strong public backing behind him, met the Governor on 17 October, 1945, as the representative of the AFPFL 'provisional government'.³⁸ He requested the Governor to appoint seven out of the eleven members of the new Executive Council from a list of names submitted by the AFPFL Supreme Council. The League's spokesmen, U Ba Pe, Aung San, and Than Tun demanded that all Council posts except foreign affairs and Defence should be entrusted to them. They asked for the higher judiciary to be completely Burman and also for the assignment of a Burmese adviser to the London Office of the Secretary of State for India and Burma. They also attached two conditions. The first was that the portfolio of Home must be filled by one of their own nominees. The second condition was that their nominees would be permitted to accept guidance from the Supreme Council of the AFPFL. They also demanded early revision of the official White Paper by London.³⁹

The Governor refused to accept these conditions as he considered them excessive. Dorman-Smith had no new instructions from London to deal with Aung San in a more conciliatory manner. He offered only two seats to the AFPFL in the Executive Council. But this offer was flatly refused. Thus the negotiations broke down on 28 October, 1945.⁴⁰ Now Aung San and the League intensified their struggle against the British. The gap between the Governor and the AFPFL widened.

On 18 November, 1945, at a mass meeting held at the Shwedagon Pagoda in Burma, Aung San openly challenged

38. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 70.

39. Aung San, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

40. *Ibid.*

the government. It was the "biggest mass meeting ever held in Burma."⁴¹ Aung San made the huge audience aware with the fact that the proposals put forward by the AFPFL had been rejected by the Governor. He declared that the Supreme Council of the AFPFL would "henceforth concentrate all its efforts to get the programme changed."⁴² A series of resolutions were adopted. One of them asked for the mobilization of the Burmese people; while another offered practical service to the people. Another important resolution aimed at telling the world and the British people as to how the British had come back to Burma to establish monopolistic rule. Aung San made it clear that Burma's battle for freedom had just begun.

Dorman-Smith appointed his Executive Council without including representatives of the AFPFL on 1 November, 1945. The composition of Governor's Executive Council included three Britons and nine Burmese with the portfolios as follows: Sir John Wise—Defence and External Affairs, Sir Paw Tun—Home and Judicial, Sir Htoon Aung Gyaw—Finance and Revenue, U Pu—Agriculture and Rural Economy, U Aye—Commerce and Supplies, U Ba On—Industry and Labour, Thakin Yan Aung—Education, U Lun—Public Works and Rehabilitation, Mung Ba Khin—Social Services, Major-General C.F.B. Pearce—Without Portfolio, U Tharrawaddy Maung Maung—Transport and Communications. This Council was headed by Sir Paw Tun and included other pre-war leaders. They had no standing among the nationalists. Thus the Governor's administration failed to command Burmese support in competition with the AFPFL.

British officials and the Executive Council denounced the AFPFL. The activities of the League were regarded as subversive of law and order. The Governor announced that the door was still open for the participation of the AFPFL in the

41. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 70.

42. *Ibid.*

Executive Council. But by that time the matter had turned to be as a clash of personalities. In December, 1945, Aung San denounced Dorman-Smith as unworthy of representing democratic Britain. As leader of the opposition he openly refused to participate in the legislative council.⁴³

Dorman-Smith challenged the claim of the AFPFL to represent the whole of Burma. He had even intended to put down the AFPFL Council by force due to its defiance of his authority. But he was not sure of active support from London for such a move. He was also aware of the fact that Mountbatten had repeatedly recognized the de facto political status of the nationalist leadership of the AFPFL.⁴⁴ A number of factors added to the growing popularity and strength of the AFPFL. Firstly the top leaders of the AFPFL, particularly Aung San, Than Tun, Mya, and Nu, were men of magnetic personality and recognized integrity. They were wholly devoted to the cause of freedom of the country. They commanded the allegiance and support of the people. Another factor in favour of Aung San and the AFPFL was the PVO with some 25,000 men with actual fighting experience. The peasant and worker organisations sponsored by the Communist and Socialist parties provided mass support to the AFPFL. Thakins Than Tun and Thein Pe were active in gaining peasant support by advocating the revolutionary slogan of 'no rent, no taxes'. Finally the AFPFL Council was also strengthened in its nationalist political agitation by sympathetic and liberal attitudes of Mountbatten and the Labour Government of England under Attlee.⁴⁵ It has been rightly observed by Trager: "It was fortunate for the relations between Britain and Burma in those critical months of the liberation that the diplomacy, understanding, and vision of Lord Mountbatten were on the scene. The peoples of Burma responded warmly to him, and regard him to this day as their friend."⁴⁶

43. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 524.

44. *Ibid*, p. 518.

45. *Ibid*, pp 519-520.

46. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 105.

The AFPFL thus strengthened demanded an immediate election, a constitutional convention, and self-government. The Governor was unsuccessful in gaining the backing of the AFPFL and its leaders. He was also unable to get local leaders in his favour.⁴⁷ Aung San had promised to the peoples to bring 'Independence within one year' in the event of their taking office⁴⁸ under Executive Council. The months that followed have been regarded as a war of nerves between the administration of Dorman-Smith and the AFPFL.

In January 1946, the AFPFL convened its first nationwide rally at the Shwe Dagon Pagoda grounds in Rangoon. It was the first great assembly of peoples. It "consolidated support for the League and enhanced the standing of Aung San."⁴⁹ People from all over the country and from all walks of life participated in the rally. The AFPFL elected Aung San as its leader. "It was a great upsurge."⁵⁰ Aung San criticized the economic and administrative policies of the Government. He said in his inaugural address at this rally: "Let the Governor if he so wishes evade reality and resort to his way of manoeuvre. Let him resort to his guerrilla tactics and his grand strategy of economic fascism. We are not perturbed.... The British Government merely gives us a White Paper about the vague promises, about the so-called land of theirs...domination status within an indefinite period of time."⁵¹ Aung San clearly demonstrated on this occasion that he commanded popular loyalty and respect and the Burmese people stood solidly behind him. He emerged as the unrivalled political leader of Burma and the national hero.

The opposition offered by the AFPFL disturbed not only Dorman-Smith in Rangoon but also His Majesty's Government in London. Aung San and the League became more

47. Kahin, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

48. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 107.

49. Donnison, *Burma*, p. 131.

50. Maung Maung, *Burma's Constitution*, p. 73.

51. Aung San, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65.

strong. They held the support of the PVO behind them. Even older politicians and senior officials like U Thein Maung, Sir Maung Gyee, U Ba Pe, U Tin Tut and Dr. Set co-operated actively with the League. All the mass organizations such as the peasants, the youth, the workers, the service unions, the Muslim League, and the women's associations joined hands with the AFPFL.⁵² As the pace of unrest quickened, each new incident added to the strength of Aung San and his associates. There was discontent in the Executive and Legislative Councils of the Governor. "The Councillors meant well, and did their best to serve, but they enjoyed no real powers but what the Governor granted them, and the Governor had no real powers in the country, for the people did not obey his writs any more, but followed Aung San and the AFPFL."⁵³

A rift almost developed within the League during the course of the AFPFL rally. The communist spokesmen openly challenged the League's emphasis on attaining freedom by peaceful means. Particularly Thakin Soe tried to exploit rising popular resentment to promote revolutionary ends. But moderate communist leaders like Than Tun and Thein Pe were not ready to disrupt the nationalist front at this critical moment. They, therefore, refused to co-operate with Soe.⁵⁴

After the AFPFL convention, the Governor made futile efforts in early 1946 to pose an opposition to the AFPFL with the help of some Burmese leaders who had been exiled. Dorman-Smith welcomed back in Burma Thakins Ba Sein and Tun Oke from their wartime exile. In February 1946, U Saw was brought back to Burma from Uganda prison. The Governor wrongly anticipated that U Saw would challenge the authority of Aung San as a leader of the entire country. On the contrary, U Saw compelled his Myochit followers to resign from the

52. Maung Maung, *Burma's Constitution*, p. 77.

53. Quoted, Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, pp. 71-72.

54. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 527.

Council when the Governor declined to accept his own terms. However, it was quite evident by March 1946 that the Governor failed to build up a rival nationalist faction in competition with the AFPFL.⁵⁵

British officials advised the Governor in March 1946 to arrest Aung San on a charge of murder. The affair was widely reported in Rangoon and London. The Governor and Sir Paw Tun moved to arrest Aung San. But British army leaders protested that it was actually a political move which was sure provoke widespread rebellion in Burma. In spite of this, the Labour Government ordered a warrant to be issued in April. Fortunately, the order was countermanded shortly thereafter before it could be executed. This incident greatly enhanced Aung San's reputation.⁵⁶ It was clear to the AFPFL that the British government could not dare to arrest Aung San due to his widespread popular support in the country. News of the proposed arrest aroused a storm of public protest in Burma. The AFPFL now ruled out any possibility of conciliation with Dorman-Smith's government.⁵⁷

The overall situation in Burma deteriorated rapidly after March 1946. Expressions of political disaffection and lawlessness increased throughout the countryside at an alarming rate. The civil administration had great difficulty in restoring law and order. The British Parliament twice debated the deteriorating situation in Burma in the spring of 1946. During the brief regime of Dorman-Smith, the AFPFL leaders became suspicious of British intentions to put great emphasis on rehabilitation of the large British enterprises in the country. They protested on all occasions against the plans for the re-entry of foreign business firms to Burma.⁵⁸ It was clear by now that the AFPFL had a big majority support in the country. There were no other political parties or groups in Burma to

55. *Ibid.*, p. 528.

56. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*. p. 71.

57. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, pp. 528-29.

58. Donnison, *Burma*, p. 132.

oppose the AFPFL successfully. Under the situation the possibility of a rebellion in Burma increased due to growing disorder. The British government was left with no alternative except to gain the co-operation of the AFPFL.⁵⁹

Moderate AFPFL leadership was determined not to use revolutionary violence against the British. Aung San announced that "We want no violence and bloodshed at all, and we are... determined to exhaust legitimate opportunities before resorting to violent methods."⁶⁰ But mass demonstrations were organized in order to give the AFPFL bargaining power with the British administration. A People's Volunteer Organization (PVO) had been set up as a para-military force. It tried to impress upon the British by drilling with dummy rifles in the streets of Rangoon.⁶¹ The Governor sharply reacted to the wearing of military uniforms and the performance of military drill by non-military personnel. But Aung San wisely defended the PVO by pleading that its members wore uniforms because there was not enough other clothing; they drilled with the purpose of joining the Burma army later on. Aung San, however, maintained that if some of them violated the law, they might be arrested and immediately tried. But they could not be detained for a long time without trial. The Governor also criticised the Burmese press for describing him as an 'imperialist' and a 'capitalistic expansionist'. He was very critical of the anti-government attitude of the press.⁶²

Aung San forcefully maintained the position of the nationalists in his presidential address at the opening of the second session of the AFPFL Supreme Council on 16 May, 1946. He stated that there was growing discontent among labour, peasantry and government servants in Burma against the British administration. But even then the AFPFL was prepared to negotiate with the British. Aung San said: "We

59. *Ibid.*

60. Aung San, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-35.

61. Maung Maung, *Burma in the Family of Nations*, p. 106.

62. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 72.

still offer our hand of friendship, we still do desire to come to peaceful settlement on the questions both immediate and long term. Meanwhile we remain in prepared peace." He further pointed out that "if legitimate opportunities are open to us to work for our declared aims and objectives, we will try and exhaust those opportunities first. This does not mean that we must not make any other preparations. For now, after all that has happened in our country, we feel that we may not reach our goal only by legal means. We must prepare for an extra legal struggle for our freedom, if that should become necessary..."⁶³ Thus his proposals to the British government basically remained unchanged. The nationalist leaders wanted recognition of the full right of Burma to independence. Aung San expressed the view that if the proposals were accepted by the British, Burma might choose to enter the British Commonwealth of Nations. The proposals of Aung San were unanimously approved by the council.⁶⁴ Thus the Supreme Council of the AFPFL left the way open for conciliation with the British on Aung San's terms.

Peaceful and orderly demonstrations in favour of the AFPFL continued all over Burma. But some of them, however, resulted in incidents of violence. It greatly stimulated anti-British feeling and served the purposes of Aung San and his followers. On 18 May, 1946, the police fired on the crowd killing three peasants while attempting to break up a demonstration. Aung San organized public funeral and ably controlled an explosive situation.⁶⁵

Governor Dorman-Smith made futile attempts to advance reform proposals in Burma towards the end of his tenure. On 22 April, 1946, he made proposal for new elections for a constituent assembly. He even proposed reconstitution of the Executive Council and agreed to give equal representation

63. Aung San, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

64. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 73.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

to the followers of Sir Paw Tun, U Saw, and Aung San. But by that time London realized that the White Paper plan was not workable. Prime Minister Attlee favoured a new policy for Burma.⁶⁶ Dorman-Smith, in a message to Arthur Henderson, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Burma, expressed his desire to resign. On 4 May, 1946, Dorman-Smith was called to London by Prime Minister Attlee for consultations. But his departure was delayed for more than a month.

The government in London had already recognized the strength and popularity of Aung San and the AFPFL. Tom Driberg and other Labour Party spokesmen had advocated in Parliament the case of Burma's economic and political freedom. The League even vainly tried to receive permission for sending a delegation to London. But the uncooperative attitude of the Governor had stood in the way. The Conservative Party asked for a debate in London Parliament on Burma at the end of May 1946. A full debate on Burma took place in the House of Commons on 7 June, 1946. Henderson made it clear that the Labour Government had not taken a final decision regarding Burma but the resignation of the Governor had been accepted. He referred to the AFPFL as a 'promising party' which had strong support and great possibilities. He also called upon the leaders of the League to join the existing Executive Council.⁶⁷

It was, however, clear that the usefulness of the Governor had come to an end. It was learnt in Rangoon that the Governor was keeping ill-health and had been asked to be relieved. But just before his departure, Dorman-Smith held a meeting with Aung San and four others on 6 June. They were again asked by the Governor to join the Executive Council but they maintained their previous stand. The Governor assured them to convey their views to his government.⁶⁸

66. Cady, *The United States and Burma*, pp. 181-82.

67. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 74.

68. *Ibid.*

Dorman-Smith resigned on 4 August, 1946 and the new Governor, Sir Hubert Rance, started for Rangoon to take over the charge. But meanwhile Sir Henry F. Knight was appointed the acting Governor on 31 July. Knight continued the unconciliatory policy toward the AFPFL and the situation remained as usual. The acting Governor gave a threat of strong action against those persons "making subversive and inflammatory speeches." He believed that such speeches "foster a spirit of lawlessness."⁶⁹

The policy of the AFPFL did not change with the change of Governors. The League continued to campaign actively for achieving its objectives. A mass demonstration was held in Rangoon on 8 June, 1946, in which about 50,000 people participated. It demanded complete independence, the resignation of the existing administration, and the withdrawal of all British troops. Aung San, while addressing the demonstrators, declared that the AFPFL wanted to achieve its objectives by peaceful and legal means. He indicated that if their demands were not met there might be civil disobedience or a parallel government.⁷⁰ By repeated demonstrations and strikes, Aung San wanted to influence the British to recognize the AFPFL and its policies.

The AFPFL held meetings on 24 and 25 July to celebrate the arrival of Suresh Bose, brother of Indian revolutionary leader, Subhas Bose. These meetings served as a prelude to a new campaign against repressive measures. The campaign was to start at the end of August, immediately before the expected arrival of the new Governor, Rance.

In July 1946, a number of disturbances and strikes were organized by the Communist Party of Burma and its affiliated Red Flag Workers' Unions. Aung San publicly declared that the AFPFL would not participate in these demonstrations.

69. *The Statesman*, Calcutta, 16-17, July 1946.

70. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*. op. cit., p. 8447A.

The acting Governor, on 15 July banned the communist organizations by declaring them as unlawful associations. It was officially announced that the organizations interfered with the maintenance of law and order and posed a danger to the public peace. The offices of the Communist Party were raided and propaganda materials were seized. But no arrest was made. However, the government's ban did not apply to the communist group led by Thakin Than Tun and Thein Pe. This group was with the AFPFL. In his address to the third Supreme Council meeting of the AFPFL, Aung San expressed the faith that success could be achieved in Burma through 'work, action, and self-reliance.'⁷¹

The new Governor, Hubert Rance, arrived in Rangoon on 30 August and assumed the office of Governor on 1 September, 1946. He had to face well-planned strikes in Burma shortly after his arrival. The railwaymen, postal and telegraph workers, government servants, and the police all went on strike. The administration and trade of the country were mostly paralysed.⁷² Though the strikes were not political in nature at the outset, several nationalist groups took advantage of the opportunity. The AFPFL not only instigated the strike but even supported it.⁷³ The League had a motive to force a reassessment of British policy. The AFPFL also staged a supporting protest march in the middle of September.

Hubert Rance was quite confident that the future of Burma depended upon conciliation with Aung San and the AFPFL. He took immediate steps for gaining the support of Burmese nationalist leaders to avoid any crisis. He looked upon Aung San as a friend, not as an ex-enemy. The Governor was provided with full authority to reconstitute the Executive Council on a broader and more representative basis.⁷⁴ He

71. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 75.

72. Deptt. of Information, Government of the Union of Burma, *Burma's Fight for Freedom*, Rangoon, 1948, pp. 41ff.

73. Donnison, *Burma*, p. 133.

74. U.K., Commons, *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 426, 21 October, 1946, p. 298.

entered into negotiations with leaders of all political parties in Burma. His aim was to form a new Executive Council on a coalition basis which would give representation to all trends of Burmese opinion. This move of the Governor proved to be successful. All the leading groups in Burma, including the AFPFL, The Myochit Party, and other groups, showed their willingness to participate in such an administration. Thus the crucial phase of mutual ill-feeling and hostility between the British and the Burmans came to an end.

On 26 September, 1946, Hubert Rance was authorized by London to declare that on his recommendation His Majesty's Government had agreed to accept the proposal of the AFPFL with regard to the Executive Council originally made to Dorman-Smith in October 1945. The White Paper was scrapped and the AFPFL gained recognition. The leaders of the AFPFL quickly accepted the solution of Governor Rance. The call of the AFPFL for nation-wide 'anti-White Paper demonstrations' now turned into victory celebrations.⁷⁵

Thus, as has been mentioned earlier, the real conflict between the British and the Burmans commenced soon after the restoration of civil administration in Burma under Governor Dorman-Smith. There were some important points of difference between the policies of Dorman-Smith and the expectations of Aung San and the AFPFL. The main issue was the strong determination of the Governor not to recognize the AFPFL. Governor's setting aside the claim of the League to speak for the people of Burma brought about a confrontation between them. Mutual distrust between the Governor and Burmese nationalist leaders greatly intensified the conflict. "The main issue was not the allocation of seats in the Executive Council; it went much deeper than that. The issue was who should govern: the Governor representing the British Crown, or the AFPFL representing the people."⁷⁶

75. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 76.

76. Maung Maung, *Burma and General Ne Win*, p. 172.

Thus the period of conflict and confrontation between the British and the Burmans proved to be a turning-point in the freedom struggle of Burma. It generated an intense nationwide impatience to carry on the struggle for political freedom against the British rule that had re-entered the country. The entire Burmese population stood solidly behind the fight for freedom under the dynamic leadership of Aung San and the AFPFL. This political struggle brought Burma nearer to her goal of independence. The installation of Hubert Rance as the Governor of Burma marked the beginning of a new phase in British-Burmese relations. The period of conflict and confrontation ended in August 1946 and a new phase of conciliation and co-operation between the British and the Burmans began. It was during this final phase that steps towards independence were taken by the British in cooperation with the nationalists led by Aung San.

Conciliation and Co-operation between the British and the Burmans

Conciliation and co-operation between the British and the Burmans from September 1946 to December 1947 constituted the last deciding phase of the freedom struggle in Burma. It played a large part in shaping the preparation for independence. Taking over the office of the Governor of Burma by Hubert Rance at the end of August 1946 marked the beginning of conciliatory and co-operative policy of the British towards Burma. The AFPFL subsequently emerged as the most powerful political organization recognized by the British. The British began to display a desire to meet the political demands of the AFPFL during the second half of 1946. Burman leaders gradually became confident of their ability to govern the country and to achieve their political, economic, and social objectives. They successfully concluded negotiations with the British government which paved the way for a smooth transfer of power. Ultimately the independence of Burma was achieved in a somewhat peaceful manner; mainly due to the liberal outlook of the British Prime Minister Attlee and co-operative attitude of Hubert Rance, the last British Governor in Burma. The events which finally led to the independence of Burma from Britain were of immense significance in the struggle for freedom of the country.

Prime Minister Attlee appointed Hubert Rance as Governor of Burma at the initiative of Mountbatten. This decision of the British Government prepared the way for a friendly relation between Britain and Burma. The new Governor adopted conciliatory attitude in dealing with recognized nationalist leaders of Burma. "The two-way correspondence between Tom Driberg and the AFPFL leaders undoubtedly contributed much to the confidence of the Burmese leaders in the possibility of a peaceful settlement."¹ Hubert Rance was favourably regarded by Aung San. Rance undertook the task of eliciting the co-operation of the AFPFL and its leaders. While a general strike was going on in Burma, the Governor interviewed the AFPFL leaders and two pre-war premiers, Ba Maw and U Saw. He also talked with Thakio Ba Sein.²

The Governor announced the dissolution of the old Executive Council in September 1946. The new Executive Council was formed on 26 September with Aung San as Deputy Chairman or its de facto leader.³ A new council of nine members under the Chairmanship of the Governor was set up. It included representatives of the six major political parties and independenceists. The following were the members: Aung Sao, Defence and External Affairs; Thakio Mya, Home and Judicial Affairs; U Thein Pe, Agriculture; U Saw, Education; U Tin Tut, Finance; U Ba Pe, Commerce and Supplies; Thakin Ba Sein, Transport and Communications; and Mahn Ba Khaing and U Aung Zan Wai representing the Karens and Arakanese respectively. The general strike was called off within a week after the new council took office. It was announced that the reorganized Executive Council would have the same powers as enjoyed by the Burma ministers in 1937-42.⁴ It was also said that the new Executive Council would be kept informed regarding matters concerning their

1. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 635.

2. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 75.

3. Maung Maung, *Burma's Constitution*, p. 78.

4. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 538.

governance. The Governor thus gained the confidence of the AFPFL.

The AFPFL-dominated Executive Council continued to act as the de facto administration of Burma prior to the gaining of actual independence. The AFPFL leaders made a public announcement on 26 September, 1946. They referred to the new council as an Interim Government, which could break the "prolonged political deadlock" resulting from "the breakdown of political negotiations between the AFPFL and the British Government."⁵ The acquisition of the Defence and External Affairs ministries was regarded by them as an advance over the Act of 1935. But the AFPFL leaders made it clear that the "Interim Government...does not yet satisfy the complete requirements of a National Government as we have envisaged (it) and is certainly not yet a Provisional Government which could lead us straight to the establishment of a free, independent Burma."⁶ However, now real power came into the hands of the AFPFL.

Aung San and the AFPFL had a great challenge before them after coming into power. They had to demonstrate their ability to represent and lead the country. It was their responsibility to maintain law and order to preserve the essential unity of Burmese nationalism while carrying on a positive programme. Meanwhile, the rift between the AFPFL and the communists had been widening. The Communist Party initially participated in the newly formed Executive Council along with the AFPFL. But it soon turned against Aung San and the Council because it disliked the way through which they had ended the general strike in the country. Aung San as President of the AFPFL realized that it was not possible to work with the communists. On 10 October, 1946, the Executive Committee of the AFPFL decided to exclude completely the Communist Party from the AFPFL. Communist Thein Pe was

5. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 76.

6. Quoted in *Ibid.*

compelled to resign his cabinet post to the Executive Council of the government.⁷ The decision of the Executive Committee of the League was ratified by the Supreme Council of the League at its meeting in early November. Thejo Pe, however, made it clear on 28 October that in the forthcoming elections the Communist Party would make an appeal to the country for safeguarding the national movement and to achieve complete freedom for Burma. Aung San and the Executive Council were denounced by him as tools of the policy of repression in collaboration with imperialism. He further said that the communists would organize mass political strikes and would encourage worker's and peasant's movements against imperialism and capitalism before the holding of the elections.⁸ Thus the new government under the Executive Council was faced with an opposition at the very outset.

The newly born Executive Council, under the guidance of Aung San and the AFPFL, formulated a number of far-reaching proposals by early November. On 8 November, 1946, the British Government was formally requested by the Executive Council under Aung San for making necessary arrangements for transfer of power to a fully independent Burma.⁹ On 10 November, a four-point demand was presented to the British Government jointly by Aung San, the AFPFL, and the Executive Council.¹⁰ These demands were concerned with the election of a Constituent Assembly by April 1947, with representation for the frontier peoples as well. London was asked to issue a proclamation before 31 January, 1947, that full independence would be accorded to Burma within one year of the date of proclamation. Finally, the programme for economic recovery would have to be fully reexamined within the same period.¹¹ Soon after placing these demands, Aung

7. *Ibid*, pp. 76-77.

8. *Ibid*.

9. W.C. Johnstone compiled, *A Chronology of Burma's International Relations, 1945-58*, Rangoon, 1959, p. 5.

10. Donnison, *Burma*, p. 132.

11. *Ibid*.

San moved throughout the frontier areas and urged the Shan, Kachin, and Chin leaders to join independent Burma having separate status, full autonomy, protection of minority rights, and privileges of secession.

A one-year time table was adopted and publicized by the AFPFL to negotiate with the British Government. The League attached great importance to the time-table. The AFPFL members of the Executive Council gave a threat to resign if their demands were not met by the British before 31 January, 1947.¹² The British Labour Government graciously agreed to the demands of the AFPFL. Governor Rance declared on 3 December in the Orient Club of Rangoon that he had undertaken the task of leading Burma to full self-government within the shortest possible period. He made it clear that His Majesty's Government had no intention to stand in the way of Burma's freedom.

On 20 December, 1946, the British Prime Minister, Attlee, made a statement in the House of Commons regarding the future of Burma. He declared that the people of Burma would themselves decide their political future.¹³ He also expressed the view that the British Government would help Burma in attaining self-government within a shortest duration of time and in a convenient way. He further stated that any unwilling peoples would not be retained within the Commonwealth and Empire. The administration of Burma was in the hands of Burmese members in the Executive Council of the Governor. He expressed the hope that an orderly and rapid progress was of great importance for the Burmese people.¹⁴ Thus the announcement of the Prime Minister was of far-reaching significance with regard to Burma's political future.

The British Prime Minister also proposed that a Burma delegation from the Executive Council would be invited to

12. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 77.

13. Maung Htin Aung, *The Stricken Peacock: Anglo-Burmese Relations*,

14. Maung Maung, *Burma and General Ne Win*, p. 186.

visit London for the purpose of discussing constitutional reforms and revision of the White Paper. The AFPFL leaders accepted the invitation of London on 26 December after thorough discussion. The Under Secretary of State for Burma came to Rangoon on 1 January, 1947, and seconded the invitation of Attlee.¹⁵

The announcement of the British Prime Minister aroused some comments in Britain. Churchill criticized the British policy and denounced it as the betrayal of Britain to her loyal Karen friends in Burma. But his comment was of no use. Even some followers of Attlee and a number of his opponents were of the view that Britain would never allow Burma to go out of the British Empire. But Attlee Government did not find any logic behind this view. In 1945, the Burmese had already demanded from the British complete independence and they also had decided to make their new State a republic. Thus the question of Burma continuing on as a part of the British Empire did not arise because either a fully sovereign state or a republic would not exist within an empire.¹⁶

The six-member Burma delegation under the leadership of Aung San left Burma on 1 January, 1947 and arrived in London on 9 January. In addition to Aung San, other members of the delegation were U Ba Pe, Thakin Mya, U Tin Tut, U Ba Sein, and U Saw.¹⁷ Four advisers, who also formed part of the delegation, were U Kyaw Nyein, U Aung Thaw, U Ba Yin, and Thakin Chit. A highly competent and politically wise Daw Than E accompanied the delegation as hostess.¹⁸

The departure of the Burmese delegation for London on the very first day of the year 1947 was to yield good results.

15. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 541.

16. Maung Htin Aung, *The Stricken Peacock: Anglo-Burmese Relations*, p. 122.

17. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 541.

18. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 78.

Maung Maung has rightly observed : "Now in December, the AFPFL was in the Government, and going to London as guests of His Majesty's Government. The long and bitter night of 1946 thus drew to a close with the bright and cheerful sun of hope rising on the horizon."¹⁹ But, on the other hand, preparations for a wide-scale nationalist rebellion meanwhile continued in Burma in case essential demands of the delegation were not met. Communist agitators, the well-armed PVO veteran groups, and students took the lead in it and were waiting for the signal to rise. Aung San also declared before his visit to London that he would make all efforts for the best but people must be ready to struggle if London failed to meet their demands.²⁰

But happily for Burma, the talks in London, which began on 13 January, 1947, between Attlee and his Labour Government, and Aung San and the Burmese delegation proceeded speedily and in an atmosphere of complete understanding leading finally to satisfactory conclusions.²¹ The delegation negotiated with the British Prime Minister between 13 and 24 January.²² The final agreement was signed in London between Aung San and Attlee on 27 January 1947. It was signed in a remarkable spirit of give-and-take. This agreement was popularly known in Burma as the "Aung San-Attlee Agreement."²³ U Tin Tut, a member of the Burmese delegation, described the signing of the treaty as a historic moment. He held the view that Attlee and Aung San put their signatures on the final copies of the treaty with firm hands. He further stated that they had made history and a new era of Anglo-Burmese friendship and co-operation had started. The agreement was soon accepted by the AFPFL and the people. It

19. Maung Maung, *Burma's Constitution*, p. 79.

20. J.S. Furnivall, "Twilight in Burma : Independence and After", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. XXII, 1949, pp. 161-63.

21. Maung Maung, *Burma's Constitution*, p. 79.

22. Johnstone compiled, *A Chronology of Burma's International Relations*, p. 6.

23. Maung Maung, *Burma and General Ne Win*, p. 188.

was really "a big step forward towards the goal of independence within one year."²⁴

The conclusions reached in the conversations between His Majesty's Government and the delegation from the Executive Council of the Governor of Burma were significant and far-reaching. After discussing all the matters affecting the future relations between Britain and Burma, a number of important agreed conclusions were reached regarding the methods through which the people of Burma might achieve their independence as early as possible, either within or without the Commonwealth.²⁵ The agreement provided for elections to a Constituent Assembly in April 1947. This Assembly was to be completely free to determine the future course of Burma and the British Government agreed to abide by its verdict regarding the form of self-government. It was also mentioned that a selected portion of the elected body would later serve as an interim Legislative Assembly. The Executive Council of the Governor was to constitute the Interim Government of Burma until a constitution was adopted and the date of independence of the country was fixed. It was made clear that "the Executive Council will be treated with the same close consultation and consideration as a Dominion Government and will have the greatest possible freedom in the exercise of the day-to-day administration of the country."²⁶ The Executive Council was given control of the armed forces and budget. The powers of the Councilors for Defence and External Affairs were increased. A High Commissioner for Burma was to be appointed immediately to represent the Burmese Government in London.²⁷ The agreement also provided that Britain would

24. Maung Maung, *Burma's Constitution*, p. 80.

25. "Conclusions Reached in the Conversations between His Majesty's Government and the Delegation from the Executive Council of the Governor of Burma", in Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic* Appendix VIII, pp. 185-88.

26. "The Aung San-Attlee Agreement", *Burma's Fight for Freedom*, in Roger M. Smith edited, *South East Asia—Documents of Political Development and Change*, Ithaca, 1973, p. 88.

27. *Ibid*, p. 89.

sponsor Burma's admission to the United Nations Organization.

However, the Burmese demands regarding the frontier areas were not fully met. The Burmese had been pressing upon inclusion of the frontier areas in independent Burma. With regard to Frontier Areas, the London agreement conceded that "it is the agreed objective of both His Majesty's Government and the Burmese Delegates to achieve the early unification of the Frontier Areas and Ministerial Burma with the free consent of the inhabitants of those areas. In the meantime it is agreed that the people of the Frontier Areas should in respect of subjects of common interest be closely associated with the Government of Burma in a manner acceptable to both parties."²⁸ Thus the Aung San-Attlee Agreement paved the way for the Burmans and the Frontier peoples for free intercourse and for frontier leaders to become members of the Governor's Executive Council. It provided that the minority tribal peoples themselves would be represented on the final frontier areas committee. Britain also agreed to met a portion of Burma's current revenue deficit, and to make an additional cash loan. Both the opening and closing paragraphs of the conclusions indicated that the Burmese people would have the right to choose whether they would remain within the British Commonwealth or not.²⁹

Aung San returned to Burma in triumph. He declared after his return that Burma would have her freedom within a year. The majority of the Burma rallied to Aung San and to the AFPFL, and approved of the London Agreement. Aung San reported to the people on 4 February, 1947, "The road to freedom is open now". He further said, "We came to agreements in London for the election of a Constituent Assembly, an assembly of nationals only, which will draft the constitution of independent Burma. The British Government has also agreed

28. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

29. For details, see "The Aung San-Attlee Agreement", Appendix II, pp. 213-219.

to invest our Government with the powers of a national government". Regarding the people of the frontier areas, he stated, "They must decide their own future. If they wish to come in with us, we will welcome them on equal terms."³⁰ The London Agreement was thus "a fair and reasonable agreement, honestly negotiated."³¹

The communists and some prewar politicians of Burma, however, opposed the agreement. Among these who denounced the Aung San-Attlee Agreement and demanded further concessions from Britain were U Saw, Thakin Ba Sein, Ba Maw, the communists, some members of the PVO, and separatists from the Arakan region. U Saw and Ba Sein dissociated themselves from the London Agreement and refused to sign it. They even resigned from the Executive Council. But Prime Minister Attlee held the view that their dissent was of no importance.³² These two were immediately replaced by two highly regarded nationalists, Deedok Ba Choe and Abdul Razak, in the council. U Saw and Ba Sein soon joined with Ba Maw and Paw Tun to form the Democratic Nationalist Opposition Front.³³ Although the communists and other left-wing groups denounced the agreement as a sell out to the British, Aung San was determined to carry it out. In spite of being vocal, the opposition groups failed to affect the outcome of the agreement either by means of agitation or strikes. The Aung San-Attlee Agreement was ratified by the AFPFL on 5 February and by the Executive Council on the following day. Thus the time-table of Burma's independence was set out.

Following the formal approval of the London Agreement Aung San moved forward to find out a solution to unite Burmans with the frontier areas peoples. It was actually a hurdle in the way of the Interim Government. The principal minority groups, the Shans, the Kachins, the Karens, and the

30. Maung Maung, *Burma and General Ne Win*, p. 188.

31. Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 840.

32. Maung Maung, *Burma and General Ne Win*, p. 188.

33. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 78.

Chins, were prepared to fight than to come under Burman control. The conclusions of the agreement offered Aung San an opportunity to deal with them successfully.

The Thakins had made efforts to gain the favour of the frontier peoples in 1946. There were many among the Chins, Kachins, Shans and Karens who were nevertheless willing to further the cause of nationalism and independence at the end of the war under the leadership of U Vum Ko Hau, Sao Shwe Thaike, Sao Hkun Hkio, Sao Sam Htun, Duwas Zau Lawn, and Zau Rip. Karens were at this time already divided between those who favoured the AFPFL, and those who were Karen separatists. Aung San and Thakin Nu had, however, toured extensively the frontier areas in October-November 1946 and urged the formation of a Supreme Council of the United Hill Peoples (SCOUHP) consisting of Chins, Kachins, and Shans. Even a preliminary meeting of SCOUHP was arranged in November 1946, at Panglong, in the Shan states, in which Thakin Nu represented the AFPEL. Sao Shwe Thaike was elected President of SCOUHP.³⁴ All these preliminary moves successfully prepared the background for the main Panglong Conference of February 1947 and strengthened the confidence of Aung San to face the tasks ahead.

Aung San and U Tin Tut, along with A.G. Bottomley, British Under Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, proceeded to Panglong to attend the conference. They met with representatives of the Shans, Kachins and Chins at Panglong between 7 and 12 February, 1947. Aung San, in a speech at Panglong on 11 February, 1947, said: "If we want the nation to prosper, we must pool our resources, manpower, wealth, skills and work together. If we are divided, the Karens, the Shans, the Kachins, the Chins, the Burmese, the Mons and the Arakanese, each pulling in a different direction, the union will be torn, and we will all come to grief."³⁵ An agreement was signed at Panglong on 12 February, 1947. The members of the conference agreed to work together. They accepted that

34. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

35. Frank N. Trager, "Aung San : Father of the Union of Burma", *The Guardian*, Vol. XIII, No. 3, p. 40.

freedom would come more speedily to the people of the frontier areas through their immediate co-operation with the Interim Government.³⁶

The delegates assembled at Panglong unanimously agreed to a number of important conclusions. The agreement provided that a representative of SCOUHP was to be "appointed a Counsellor to the Governor to deal with the Frontier Areas."³⁷ An understanding was reached that the Frontier Areas would be represented in the Executive Council whenever frontier matters would be considered. The counsellor for frontier areas was to be given executive authority. There were to be two deputy counsellors representing the groups of which the appointed counsellor was not a member. It was also mentioned that "while the two Deputy Counsellors should deal in the first instance with the affairs of their respective areas and the Counsellor with all the remaining parts of the Frontier areas, they should by constitutional convention act on the principle of joint responsibility."³⁸ Full autonomy in internal administration for the Frontier Areas was granted in principle. The creation of a Kachin state was found to be desirable, and steps towards that were to be taken at the Constituent Assembly. The Panglong Agreement made it clear that "Citizens of the Frontier Areas shall enjoy rights and privileges which are regarded as fundamental in democratic countries."³⁹ It was also agreed that the Frontier Areas would be assisted financially from revenues and other sources. The Karenni states would decide whether they would accede to the Union. The question of a possible Chin state was left open by the agreement. The Federated Shao states already existed.

The Panglong Agreement may be regarded "as an impor-

36. "The Panglong Agreement", in Maung Maung, *Burma's Constitution*, Appendix III, p. 229.

37. *Ibid.*

38. "The Panglong Agreement"; Burma, Frontier Area Committee of Enquiry 1947: Report, in Roger M. Smith edited, *South-East Asia—Documents of Political Development and Change*, p. 92.

39. *Ibid.*

tant milestone on the nation's march to freedom.⁴⁰ It created a friendly atmosphere and promised the frontier peoples a wide measure of political freedom in association with an independent Burma. Shortly after the Panglong conference, the Shan States Frontier Congress was revised as an ally of the AFPFL. The conference made it possible for all parts and peoples of Burma to function together legally under the Burma Executive Council, with Aung San as its chief counsellor and architect. The agreement did not bring the Shans, Kachins, Chins, and others to a permanent union with the Burmans, but it prepared the ground on which it could be achieved at the Constituent Assembly. "The Panglong Conference sealed the fate of the future of the Frontier peoples as well as the people of ministerial Burma. They decided to fight together for the independence of Burma."⁴¹ The signing of the agreement on 12 February, 1947, is celebrated officially every year in Burma as a national holiday, Union Day.⁴²

But the Panglong Conference did not solve the important minority problem regarding the future status of some Karen-inhabited areas. The Karen National Union was critical of the emerging independent state of Burma and clearly showed preference for British rule. Burman-Karen relations began to deteriorate instead of improving in the period following the Panglong Conference. The main point of disagreement between them was over the demand for a separate Karen state. Saw Ba U Gyi, the Karen Youth Organization representative in the Executive Council, resigned his post in February 1947, and was replaced by Mahn Ba Khaing. One thing was clear that the minorities had not agreed to their inclusion in independent Burma. As Donnison observes: "What they had agreed to was co-operation, and co-operation, not with independent Burma, but with the interim Burmese government, which still had a British Governor...."⁴³

40. Maung Maung, *Burma and General Ne Win*, p. 189.

41. Yawwun, "Founding Fathers of the Union of Burma", *The Guardian*, Vol. VIII, No. 7, p. 30.

42. Maung Maung, *Burma and General Ne Win*, p. 189.

43. Donnison, *Burma*, p. 137.

The London Agreement provided for a Frontier Areas Committee of Enquiry, which was set up nearly a month after the Panglong Agreement. The committee was to enquire and report "the best method of associating the frontier peoples with the working out of the new constitution for Burma."⁴⁴ It was necessary for London to find out whether the agreement was acceptable to all parties in Burma, while making preparations for the forthcoming elections to the Constituent Assembly. The committee was to recommend a positive policy regarding the frontier areas. The committee was under a British Chairman, D. R. Rees-Williams, and consisted of eight other members, four of them from ministerial Burma and four from the Frontier Areas. It included the leaders of the Frontier Areas who had been elected as counsellors to the Governor of Burma as representatives of their respective races; the Shans, Chins and the Kachios. Thus "for the first time in the history of Burmo three frontier leaders elected by their own races sat as Members of the Executive Council of the Government of Burma."⁴⁵ The meetings of the committee began from about 7 March and concluded on 24 April, 1947. The members of the committee were assigned the task of early and voluntary unification of the Frontier Areas and Ministerial Burma. The committee presented its report after holding twenty-four formal and informal meetings in different areas.⁴⁶

The Committee of Enquiry reported that "all witnesses before us expressed without hesitation the desire that representatives of their State and local areas should take part in the work of the Constituent Assembly."⁴⁷ The committee recommended that the interim counsellors appointed after the Panglong Agreement would continue to co-operate with the Executive Council. It proposed that the Frontier Areas were to be

44. *Ibid.*

45. Yawwun, "Founding Fathers of the Union of Burma", *The Guardian*, Vol. VIII, No. 7, p. 30.

46. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 83.

47. "Report of the Burma Frontier Areas Committee of Enquiry", 1947, in Maung Maung, *Burma in the Family of Nations*, Appendix X, pp. 201-208.

allotted 45 seats in the Constituent Assembly in order to insure a "satisfactory division" : Shans 27 ; Kachins 7; Chins and others 6 ; and others 5. It further recommended that any constitutional provisions affecting the federal principle or the Frontier Areas themselves would have the support of the representatives of the Areas. Safeguards were provided to insure that the decisions of a majority of the Assembly concerning the mode of government for all of Burma would be ratified by a majority in each Frontier Areas delegation.⁴⁸

The committee warned against granting any area an excess of internal autonomy at the cost of the future central government. It also listened to the views of various groups of Karens. One group of Karen representatives demanded complete separation from Burma, while the other desired a federal Karen state similar in character to the proposed Kachin state. Still another group wanted the inclusion of predominantly Karen areas, such as the Salween district, in Ministerial Burma. The report of the committee turned down the first demand while it was quite vague with regard to the other two demands of the Karens.⁴⁹ The Shans and Kachins were in favour of autonomous states within a federated Burma. The Chins did not take a clear stand. However, the Chins living along the borders of India were against separate statehood, but they demanded full autonomy and preservation of their customs. They wanted assurance of any future agreements from Britain regarding assistance from Burma proper in matters of health, education, and other government services. The Karens completely dissociated themselves from a Burman state.⁵⁰ The AFPFL outright rejected the Karen demand for a separate state. As a result, the Karen National Union decided to boycott the Constituent Assembly elections of April, 1947. The report of the committee was approved later on 22 May, 1947.

48. *Ibid.*

49. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 83.

50. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 548.

Meanwhile, elections for the Constituent Assembly took place in Burma on 7 April, 1947. Out of a total of 255 seats, 182 were to be filled by elections in Burma proper. The Karen community was given 24 seats, while 4 seats were allotted to the Anglo-Burma community, and 45 seats to the Frontier Areas.⁵¹ On the eve of election, Aung San vehemently attacked the enemies of the AFPFL in his election speech. The attack fell mainly on the "Saw-Sein-Maw group", the "Thein-Than Communists, and the "Red Flag" communists.⁵² The elections, however, passed off peacefully. The AFPFL secured a landslide victory by capturing 170 of the 180 non-communal seats. The communists won only seven seats in the 29 seats contested. All of the twenty-four Karen candidates from the Youth Organization, supported by the AFPFL, were declared elected. Ba Maw, Thakin Ba Sein, and U Saw boycotted the elections in order to avoid personal defeat. They were aware of the strong popular support behind Aung San and the AFPFL. The Karen National Union not only boycotted the elections but decided to organize its own Parliamentary Karen National Defence Organization to parallel the Burman PVO. Hence, the Karens remained dissatisfied even after the Constituent Assembly elections.⁵³

The election results of the Constituent Assembly clearly demonstrated that the great bulk of Burmese population stood behind the AFPFL. Now the preparation for independence of Burma gained momentum. The two most important and key leaders in the preparations for independence of the country were Aung San and Mya, the former in the political field and the latter in the sphere of economic affairs. Thakin Nu, the Vice President of the AFPFL, remained in the background behind the two. He did not contest the Constituent Assembly elections in April, and was able to get a seat only in a by-election caused due to the death of an elected member. The role of Aung San was crucial because he was capable of com-

51. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 83.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

53. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, pp. 551-54.

manding the respect and confidence of the public, and particularly the allegiance of the restive elements of the PVO. Mya was an able planner and administrator. He negotiated the financial agreements with London, and also acted as Chairman of the new economic planning board. Even the preliminary draft of the new constitution of Burma was prepared under his leadership.⁵⁴

The AFPFL convened a five-day national convention of its delegates in Rangoon's Jubilee Hall. The meeting place had become the "symbol of Burma's political struggle."⁵⁵ The conference began on 18 May, 1947, to draft the constitution and to lay down Burma's independence policy. During the course of its session, the convention discussed and adopted the basic principles regarding the independence of the country. The separation of Burma from Britain became quite inevitable. Opening the convention on 19 May 1947, Aung San proclaimed that Burma must have complete independence and nothing short of complete independence would satisfy Burmese aspirations. He ruled out monarchy in any form and said that the independent republic of Burma would be established on the principles of socialism. He further expressed the view that the independent Burma would be administered and governed according to the principles of democracy. The views expressed by Aung San were approved by a resolution moved by Mya and seconded by Deedok Ba Choe immediately at the end of his speech.⁵⁶

While the meetings of the AFPFL convention were going on, a special committee under the Chairmanship of Thakin Mya met to draft a new constitution which was to be submitted to the Constituent Assembly. Aung San moved the fourteen-points resolution at the conclusion of the AFPFL convention on 23 May 1947. The first point of the resolution said: "This convention declares its firm and solemn resolve to proclaim

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 554-55.

55. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 87.

56. *Ibid.*

Burma as an independent sovereign republic."⁵⁷ The second, third and seventh points of the resolution were concerned with the Panglong Conference and the recommendations of the Frontier Areas Enquiry Report, which called for the unification of Ministerial and Frontier Burma, the latter having the right of becoming autonomous states. This provision, however, applied to the Shans, Kachins, Karens, and Chins. One point referred to a Karen Council to advise the government about Karen wishes. Other points of the resolution recommended for a President as head of state, an independent judiciary, and a bicameral legislature to consist of a chamber of deputies and a chamber of nationalities. The resolution guaranteed Burma's commitment to democratic principles, to the rights of freedom, justice, and religious tolerance, and to the "law of civilised nations...international justice and morality."⁵⁸ The resolution was passed on 23 May, the last day of the convention.

On 23 May, 1947, Aung San said in an address to the convention that preparatory convention was an AFPFL co-convention, which was not a substitute but a preparation for the Constituent Assembly. He pointed out that the co-convention was called by the AFPFL as an extra-constitutional measure. He further stated: "Unity is the foundation. Let this fact be engraved in your memory...."⁵⁹ In his concluding speech to the AFPFL convention the same day, Aung San announced that the amended form of the constitution would be the basis upon which the future constitution would be drawn. He regarded it as a major problem which was to be judged from different angles. He further declared that it was not sufficient to say that they would have a democratic government. Such a decision would have to be carried further before deciding

57. "The Fourteen Points; Government of Burma, Burma's Fight for Freedom, Rangoon, 1948, Document X", in Josef Silverstein compiled, *The Political Legacy of Aung San*, p. 35.

58. *Ibid*, 35-37.

59. "Bogyoke Aung San's Address at the Convention held at the Jubilee Hall, Rangoon on the 23rd May, 1947"; in Aung San, *Burma's Challenge*, pp. 1 ff.

which form of democratic government would be most suitable for the Burmese people.⁶⁰

Between the convention of the AFPFL and the meeting of the Constituent Assembly in June 1947, Aung San convened a series of rehabilitation and planning conferences at the Sorrento Villa in Rangoon, and discussed economic and social problems of Burma. He asked his colleagues not to waste time and energy in attacking and blaming imperialism for every ill in the country. Under the new circumstances, he advised the Burmese to solve their own problems through mutual co-operation, the "classic way of the people." This speech and programme served as the basis for the Two-Year Plan, which was adopted by the Government of the Union of Burma later on.⁶¹

The Constituent Assembly began its sessions on 10 June, 1947. In an opening address, Thakin Mya called for bringing the people of Burma to the threshold of freedom. He pointed out that political freedom was not an end in itself, rather it was a necessary means for promoting the economic and social welfare of the people. On 11 June, Thakin Nu was unanimously named by the Assembly as its permanent President.⁶² Aung San opened the historic Constituent Assembly on 16 June by presenting a seven-point resolution drawn up by the AFPFL. It was mainly the basis on which the constitution was to be drawn. The first and most important of these points was "that the constitution shall be that of an independent sovereign republic to be known as The Union of Burma."⁶³ The other points of the resolution mentioned that all powers

60. Summary and Quotations from Aung San's concluding speech to AFPFL Convention, 23 May, 1947; New Times of Burma, 24 May, 1947, Document XI", in Josef Silverstein compiled, *The Political Legacy of Aung San*, p. 38.

61. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 88.

62. *Ibid.*

63. "Bogyoke's Seven Points: Govt. of Burma, Burma's Fight for Freedom, Rangoon, 1948, Document XII", in Josef Silverstein compiled, *The Political Legacy of Aung San*, p. 39.

would be derived from the people; the constitution would guarantee justice—social, economic, and political—to all; the minorities were to be granted safeguards; and the integrity of the territory of Burma was to be maintained according to justice and international law. The seventh and the last point said: "that this historic land of Burma shall attain its rightful and honoured place in the world, make its full and willing contribution to the advancement and welfare of mankind and affirm its devotion to the ideal of peace and friendly co-operation amongst nations founded on international justice and morality."⁶⁴ The resolution moved by Aung San was approved.

On 18 June, 1947, the Assembly passed resolutions calling for the appointment of a constitutional committee of seventy-five and other necessary committees. The Assembly then recessed [to allow the committees to do their work.⁶⁵ The Constituent Assembly approved a resolution cutting all ties with the British Empire. Thus, the Assembly desired complete independence for Burma, outside the Commonwealth. The next move of the Assembly was to convey its intention to the British Government regarding taking Burma out of the Commonwealth. Accordingly, towards the end of June 1947, a delegation under Thakin Nu, consisting of U Tin Tut, U Kyaw Nyein, Bo Khin Maung Gale, and U Ko Ko Gyi, proceeded to London to arrange for an official meeting with the British Prime Minister after the Assembly completed its work.⁶⁶

One of the most important issues which aroused considerable speculation at home and abroad, had been whether Burma would become a member of the British Commonwealth or not. This question dominated the scene throughout the early part of 1947. The matter came to be settled only in the decisive meeting of the Constituent Assembly in June 1947, when the Burmese ultimately decided not to remain within

64. *Ibid.*

65. Kahin, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

66. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 80.

the British Commonwealth. During the meetings in London in January 1947, Collis and Mountbatten talked to Aung San and both held the view that he did not oppose dominion status for Burma. Slim and Governor Rance also thought of such a possibility.⁶⁷ U Tin Tut, a member of the Governor's Executive Council, favoured dominion status on the ground of the mutual advantage to Burma and Britain. He held this view until the general convention of the AFPFL in May 1947. He even realized certain difficulties in it and criticized those Englishmen who considered dominion status as a privilege. Though Tin Tut put forward his individual views for consideration, he accepted the majority decision. Another Burmese, U Ba U, who subsequently became Chief Justice and then second President of independent Burma, was of almost similar view like that of Tin Tut. However, he strongly supported independence of Burma in 1947. His attitude must have contributed towards maintaining friendly relations between Burma and Britain after independence.⁶⁸

It is often claimed by the Burmese that they would have liked to remain within the Commonwealth but the British compelled them to depart from it. But, on the other side, they were not prepared to accept any status below that of a fully sovereign republic. The Statute of Westminster was so constructed that all nations within the Commonwealth were to accept the British sovereign as their Head of State. So, it was not possible for a republic to become a member of the Commonwealth. But later on a formula was adopted by which India, being a republic, became a member of the Commonwealth. Thus the failure of Britain to apply this formula to Burma resulted in her exclusion from Commonwealth.⁶⁹

The British undoubtedly desired to retain Burma within the Commonwealth, if possible. The choice of dominion status or complete separation from Britain remained open in principle

67. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

69. Donnison, *Burma*, pp. 137-38.

till the meeting of the Constituent Assembly in June 1947. During the House of Commons debate in early May 1947, Under Secretary Henderson said: "We are certain that it would be to their (Burmese) interest, as to ours, if they decided to remain within the Commonwealth and we sincerely hope they would arrive at such a decision."⁷⁰

On 3 June, 1947, the British Prime Minister, Attlee, made a statement in the House of Commons while moving the Second Reading of the Burma Independence Bill. He stated: "The purpose of this Bill is to give effect to the will of the peoples of Burma as expressed by their elected representatives that their country should become an independent state, should cease to be part of the British Commonwealth of Nations and should no longer form part of the King's Dominions."⁷¹ He continued that from then onwards the relationship between Britain and Burma would be based on a treaty and on the friendship between them to be more stronger. He stated that the departure of Burma from the British family of nations was to be no occasion for regret but the British Government hoped and desired that the people of Burma would recognize the important advantages coming from the Commonwealth's membership. But the Burmese had decided to go out of the Commonwealth. He further expressed the view that nations were free to decide the nature of their own governments. He made it clear that the British Commonwealth of Nations was a free association of peoples, not a collection of subject races.⁷² It was, therefore, the announced policy of Britain to maintain friendly relations with Burma even if she decided to leave Commonwealth. "As for Burma's membership in the Commonwealth, the British enthusiasm for this...had a chilling effect—and the Burmese opted against it."⁷³

70. Quoted, Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 87.

71. *Attlee Papers*, "P.M.'s statement in the House of Commons", 3 June, 1947, Bodleian Library, Oxford (Microfilmed).

72. *Ibid.*

73. Bingham, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

Many important factors were responsible for the decision of Burma to remain outside the Commonwealth. "The crucial Burmese decision to opt for complete independence from the Commonwealth was more the inexorable byproduct of events than the overt decision of leaders, who might have wished to avoid it."⁷⁴ The immediate post-war British policies had created popular distrust and ill-feeling among most of the Burmese. The result was that there grew an emotional desire to cut off all relations with the British. The most important factor was that the communists and their supporters had not only attacked the Aung San-Attlee Agreement but were violently opposed to any connection with Britain. Aung San, Thakin Nu, and other important Burmese leaders did not make clear statement against dominion status. The feelings of friendship for Britain did not affect Aung San's drive for a free Burma. He accepted aid from any source for independence, and shaped his anti-imperialist ideology in terms of independence. Aung San could not change his stand as it involved the risk of losing popular support and further encouraging communist agitation. Thakin Nu was impressed by the British and thought very highly of them. He said: "The British leaders were men of high ideals and good intentions towards Burma. Although they would have preferred to see Burma stay in the Commonwealth, they did not obstruct her wishes to keep out. They assisted in securing a smooth transition for her sovereign independent status."⁷⁵ However, it was clear that a majority of the Burmese people liked Burma to be an independent sovereign state. They considered that it was only on the basis of complete equality of political status that Burma would be able to establish lasting friendship with the British Government and the British people. Thus a number of decisive factors and the circumstances compelled Burma to remain outside the Commonwealth.

Meanwhile, a tragic incident interrupted the work of the Constituent Assembly on 19 July, 1947. The AFPFL leaders

74. Cady, *The United States and Burma*, p. 186.

75. U Nu, *U Nu : Saturday's Son*, p. 132.

were occupied with their usual tasks in the preparations for independence. When Aung San was presiding over a meeting of the Executive Council, he and seven other political leaders were assassinated in the Secretariat building at Rangoon by the hired gunmen of U Saw. In addition to Aung San, others killed were Thakio Mya, U Ba Choe, Mahn Ba Khaing, Sawbwa Sam Htun, Abdul Rajak, and U Ba Win, an elder brother of Aung San. U Saw and nine others were held responsible and put on trial for the assassinations. U Saw himself spread the rumour that the British had supported the plot. But his efforts to precipitate a general rebellion failed.⁷⁶ The tragedy was a great blow to the nation at this crucial time and Burma paid a heavy price in the death of Aung San.

Aung San had, however, completed his main task and secured for himself a place second to none in the history of Burma. He was the symbol of the drive for political independence of the country. "No Burman at that time commanded such personal support or showed such gifts of leadership as Aung San, and what Burma needed more than anything else was effective leadership."⁷⁷ His performance was extraordinary. He was at the height of his triumphs before his untimely death. He was one of the greatest patriots Burma had ever produced. As Maung Maung has rightly observed: "His meteoric rise was due in a large part to his own great qualities and his unwavering sense of mission; to an equally large part to the readiness of Burma's history to discover such a man at such a time and have him ride the high tides of the nationalist movement as they swept forward to the final goal."⁷⁸

Aung Sao was quite different from all other leaders in Burma. He was a man of courage and determination. Aung San commanded the confidence of the peoples of Burma.

76. Maung Maung, *A Trial in Burma: The Assassination of Aung San*, The Hague, 1962, pp. 1-2.

77. Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 842.

78. Maung Maung, *A Trial in Burma: The Assassination of Aung San*, p. 3.

Undoubtedly, he was acknowledged as the postwar architect of national unity and independence.⁷⁹ When Aung San became dissatisfied with the British postwar policy in Burma, he openly challenged the British Government and emerged as the unquestioned leader of Burma. Later on, he successfully obtained the promise of independence of Burma from the British Government and thus turned his idea into reality.⁸⁰ He was the expression of a powerful force of post-war Burmese nationalism. Shortly before his tragic end, Aung San, in a speech at a public meeting in Rangoon on 13 July, 1947, expressed the views: "Without unity and strength, independence will be meaningless; the nation will be weak and vulnerable, whatever party may be in office.... We must all, therefore, put forth our very best in our endeavours to build the new nation."⁸¹ Thus, Aung San really discovered the path for the unity and freedom of Burma.

Immediately after the assassination, Governor Rance acted promptly and called upon Thakin Nu to form a new government. Nu took the place of Aung San as Deputy Chairman of the Executive Council. The new government under Nu took over on 20 July, and the Interim Government turned into the Provisional Government on 23 July. Thakin Nu carried Aung San's work to completion. "After the assassination of U Aung San and his colleagues, there was much searching of hearts as to what was going to happen. Thakin Nu, who succeeded, had the confidence of the country, and to him faith was pinned again."⁸² Nu was able to get the support of the communist Than Tun at this juncture. The Burmese respected U Nu's sincerity and dedication as a nationalist. He assumed the difficult task of holding his party together and saving the

79. Kahin, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

80. Philip Nash, "U Aung San", *The Guardian*, Vol. IV, No. 5, p. 13.

81. Quoted, Trager, "Aung San: Father of the Union of Burma", *The Guardian*, Vol. XII, No. 3, p. 40.

82. The Ministry of Information, Govt. of the Union of Burma, *Burma Speaks: A Collection of Broadcast Talks from the Burma Broadcasting Station*, 1950, p. 131.

country from confusion. However, he had never aspired to the position he was now called upon to occupy. "He had accepted the post of head of the interim Government from Governor Sir Hubert Rance with the condition that he would service only until independence was acquired."⁸³

Thakin Nu became the Prime Minister of the Provisional Government of Burma. The members of the Executive Council were now ministers. The first cabinet of the Provisional Government consisted of the following members with their different portfolios: Bo Let Yn, Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister; Kyaw Nyein, Home and Judicial Affairs; Tin Tut, Foreign Affairs; Henzada Myn, National Planning; Pyawbwe Mya, Transport and Communications; Saw San Po Thein, Education; Aung Zan Wai, Social Services; Thakin Tin, Agriculture and Rural Economy; Bo Po Kun, Public Works and Rehabilitation; Mahn Win Maung, Industry and Labour; Ba Gyan, Finance and Revenue; Ko Ko Gyi, Commerce and Supply; Sao Hkun Hkio, Counsellor for Frontier Areas, Shan; Vum Ko Hnn, Counsellor for Frontier Areas, Chin; Sama Duwa Sinwa Nawng, Counsellor for Frontier Areas, Kachin; and Lun Baw, Chairman, Public Service Commission.⁸⁴

The crisis of late July did not retard the progress towards constitution-making in Burma. The third and final session of the Constituent Assembly under the leadership of Thakin Nu from 15 to 25 September, 1947, completed its work. The constitution for the Union of Burma was adopted on 24 September, 1947. Sao Shwe Thaik became the provisional President. On 24 September, 1947, Thakin Nu, speaking at the eighth day sitting of the Burma Constituent Assembly and moving the draft Bill of the Constitution of the Union of Burma, said that the new constitution would be leftist. The economy of Burma was to be constructed afresh and the old economic system must be abolished which provided monopoly to some people while the majority of Burmese people remained

83. Butwell, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

84. Trager, *Burma From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 90.

in poverty. Nu expressed the view: "A mere change of garb without changing the system will leave the poor masses as poor as ever....Freedom for Burma will be meaningful only when there is freedom for the masses...I wish to emphasize, therefore that in order to enjoy meaningful freedom the new Burma that we are about to construct must tend towards the left."⁵⁵ He further stated that Burma could progress only when she would be strong. He accepted the fact that Burma had become more united than ever before. Nu further said that the draft constitution of Burma contained the seeds of the freedom of the Burmese masses.⁵⁶

After the passing of the constitution by the Constituent Assembly the central theme turned to be the speeding up of the process for independence. This theme alone united the conflicting interests in Burma and brought them together within the AFPFL. The future belonged to the AFPFL and it was now a nationwide movement for independence with virtually no apparent opposition. The negotiation of the two final agreements with London completed the plan of Burma's separation from Britain. The first was a defence agreement between Britain and Burma signed on 29 August, 1947. It provided for the early evacuation of British military forces. Britain agreed at the request of Rangoon to assist in the military training of officer personnel, with facilities to be provided for three years.⁵⁷

Burma's aspirations for independence were thus, to be fulfilled at last. Thakin Nu and his associates proceeded to London to sign a final agreement with the British Labour Government. The "Nu-Attlee Agreement" was signed on 17 October, 1947. It provided for the transfer of power to Burma. It was decided that Burma would become a sovereign

85. The Ministry of Information, Government of Burma, *Towards Peace and Democracy* (Selected Speeches by Thakin Nu, Prime Minister of the Government of the Union of Burma), 1949, pp. 2 ff.

86. *Ibid.*

87. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 567.

independent republic outside the Commonwealth. The treaty defined the future relations between Great Britain and Burma. This treaty, containing fifteen articles and also included the 'Defence Agreement' of 29 August, 1947 known as 'Bozet Ya-Freeman Agreement.'⁸⁸

The Prime Minister of England, Attlee, made an important speech on the historic occasion of the signing of the treaty on 17 October. He stated that a treaty was being signed by him and the Prime Minister of Burma to regulate the matters arising out of the transfer of power by Great Britain to Burma. He made it clear that "the treaty has been freely negotiated between our two Governments as between equals. It records the full agreement that we have reached on the matters which it covers. It will be the basis of our future relations."⁸⁹ Attlee regarded the signing of the treaty as a unique occasion which anticipated a transfer of sovereignty not as a result of threat of forces but a voluntary transfer in the circumstances of friendship and mutual understanding. He was sorry to note the decision of the Constituent Assembly to keep independent Burma out of the Commonwealth which would end the long association of Burma with Britain. But he accepted the decision of the people of Burma. He further expressed the view: "In the handling of the great tasks that lie before them, the Government of Burma, under their distinguished leader whom we are so glad to have with us this morning, and the people of Burma, will go forward with the sincere good wishes of the Government and the people of this country for their advancement, prosperity, and happiness as an independent state."⁹⁰

On 23 October, 1947, a Burma Independence Bill was introduced into the British House of Commons. It provided

88. "Treaty between the Government of the United Kingdom and the Provisional Government of Burma", London, 17 October 1947, Text in Maung Maung, *Burma in the Family of Nations*, Appendix IX, pp. 190-200.

89. Attlee Papers, *op. cit.*

90. *Ibid.*

for immediate independence of Burma. On 5 November, the Bill appeared for debate at the time of the second reading. Winston Churchill led the attack. He argued that Mountbatten had never been authorised to recognize the AFPFL to speak for the whole of Burma. He pointed out that Britain was not loyal to its friends in Burma and the Labour Government would be responsible for the violent rebellion in Burma which was sure to follow. But Prime Minister Attlee made it clear that the new constitution of Burma provided for a parliamentary government with special provision for minority peoples. Henderson concluded the debate by announcing that the treaty was an expression of British good faith. Parliament approved the Bill on 14 November.⁹¹

Meanwhile, the Nu-Attlee Agreement became a target of attack in Burma in November, 1947. The communists and their supporters in Burma criticized two provisions of the Agreement. The first was concerned with British assistance in training Burma's armed forces. The second provision was with regard to payment of compensation for such British enterprises in Burma as the government might nationalize. But Thakin Nu replied that the two provisions under attack were reasonable and normal. However, relations between the AFPFL and the communists under Than Tun deteriorated.⁹²

Thakin Nu, in his speech on the National Day, 8 November, 1947, said that Burma would be a Sovereign Independent Country after 58 days. Even the people of Frontier Areas would be free to decide their own destinies. He laid emphasis on political unity and urged the PVO, Socialist and Communist Parties to unite as one party making one common cause.⁹³

In his broadcast talk on 27 November, 1947, Thakin Nu refuted the communist allegations against the Nu-Attlee Agree-

91. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, pp. 569-572.

92. Cady, *The United States and Burma*, p. 193.

93. *Towards Peace and Democracy*, op. cit., pp. 10-12

ment. He regretted that in spite of his best efforts he failed to bring unity between the AFPFL and the communists. He further expressed the view: "As president of the AFPFL I want to warn AFPFL members to beware of communist tactics. You will notice that it is not the purpose of the communists to study and weigh the Treaty and assess its true worth. Oh no! Their one and only purpose is to discredit the AFPFL."⁹⁴

The British Parliament passed the Burma Independence Act⁹⁵ in December and it received royal assent on 10 December, 1947. The Bill was approved by a vote of 228 to 114. The Act provided that on the appointed day "Burma shall become an independent country, neither forming part of His Majesty's dominions nor entitled to His Majesty's protection."⁹⁶ In a presidential address to All-Burma AFPFL Conference on 20 December, 1947, Thakin Nu said: "The independence which we lost some sixty years ago, we shall regain on the 15th day from today."⁹⁷ The passing of the Independence Act by the British Parliament thus closed the old chapter of British-Burmese relations and opened a new one.

The independence of Burma was proclaimed on 4 January, 1948 and the Union of Burma formally came into existence. The transfer of power took place at 4.20 A.M. on 4 January, an auspicious moment chosen by Burmese astrologers. The Burmese Declaration of Independence containing about nine thousand words was published on the same day. The last Governor, Hubert Rance, formally handed over power to San ShweThaike, the first President of Burma. Thakin Nu became the first Prime Minister of the independent Union of Burma. The Constituent Assembly became the Provisional Parliament until

94. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

95. "Burma Independence Act, 1947", 10 December, 1947, Text in Maung Maung, *Burma in the Family of Nations*, Appendix XI, pp. 209-213.

96. *Ibid.*

97. *Towards Peace and Democracy, op. cit.*, p. 30.

elections could be held under the provisions of the new constitution. Thus the long but continued struggle for freedom came to a happy end with the birth of the sovereign republic of the Burmese people formally styled as the Union of Burma. Burma once more became an independent country in the world after more than six decades of British rule.

The Constitution of the Union of Burma, framed by the Constituent Assembly, was a liberal one with socialist aspirations. It agreed very closely with the conception of a national government. The preamble of the constitution was as follows: "We, the People of Burma including the Frontier Areas and the Karenni States, Determined to establish in strength and unity a Sovereign Independent State, to maintain social order on the basis of the eternal principles of Justice, Liberty and Equality and to guarantee and secure to all citizens Justice, social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship, vocation, association and action; Equality of status, of opportunity and before the law. In our Constituent Assembly this Tenth day of Thadingyut Waxing, 1309 B.E. (Twenty-fourth day of September, 1947 A.D.), Do Hereby Adopt, Enact And Give to Ourselves This Constitution."⁹⁸ The constitution borrowed substantially from a number of countries: the United States, France, Yugoslavia, and the United Kingdom.⁹⁹ British Prime Minister Attlee held the view that the production and adoption of Burma's constitution without dissent by the Constituent Assembly within a period of less than four months was in itself a very remarkable achievement. He stated that the structure of the Union of Burma presented federal character. He concluded: "We are all aware that the success of the constitutions depends as much if not more on the spirit in which they are worked as on their actual provisions.

98. Constituent Assembly, *The Constitution of the Union of Burma*, Rangoon, 1947.

99. Donnison, *Burma*, p. 141.

If the spirit of co-operation and wise tolerance that we have found in Thakin Nu and his colleagues prevails in the new State of Burma her future should be bright."¹⁰⁰

The Government of the Union of Burma was constituted on British Parliamentary lines. The Prime Minister was to be chosen by the people through its Parliament. He was to command a Parliamentary majority as in Great Britain. The Constitution of the Union of Burma also provided for equality of opportunity, and the maintenance of civil liberties.¹⁰¹ The leaders of Burma thus framed a democratic constitution with certain basic provisions for the pursuit of a socialist programme in the economic fields. The newly independent Government of Burma actually needed international goodwill and co-operation to solve its manifold economic, social and political problems.

Burma was, thus, able to free herself from colonial domination after a long but successful struggle for freedom. The AFPFL dominated the scene in the final stage of this freedom struggle. Aung Sao, the founding father of Burma's independence, not only shaped the nation but also successfully led the country on march towards the goal of independence. Although he did not live to see his desire fulfilled, his goal ultimately came to be realized when Burma attained the status of a sovereign independent republic on 4 January, 1948. The emergence of Burma as an independent sovereign nation was an event of great importance. It marked the beginning of a new era in the history of Burma. Burma now formally parted company with Britain and assumed independent statehood largely through peaceful means. As it was, the actual ending of the formal ties between Britain and Burma was done in an

100. Attlee Papers, *op. cit.*

101. The Director of Information, The Union of Burma, Rangoon, "Burma's Place in the World Today", *Burma*, Vol. I, No. 1, p. 7.

atmosphere that gave hope of cooperation in the future, though Burma declared to remain outside the Commonwealth. Although great tasks of social reconstruction and economic rehabilitation lay ahead for independent Burma, she was now a free nation and her freedom was for all her sons and daughters to enjoy.

Conclusion

We have seen earlier (chapter one) that Burma came under the sway of British Indian Empire as a result of three Anglo-Burmese wars in the nineteenth century. By 1886 practically the whole of the kingdom of Burma was annexed by the British. The Burmese defeat at the hands of the British not only amounted to territorial losses, but a blow to the national prestige of the country. Burma lost her independent status and was subjected to western domination. Immediately after the conquest of Burma, the British were engaged for about a decade in the difficult task of pacification of the country. Subsequently, law and order was restored, and the administration of the country was reorganized. The elimination of monarchy did away with the traditional pattern of authority in Burma giving way to the introduction of western concepts of government and politics in the country. The history of Burma took an entirely new turn with the beginning of the British rule in the country. Burma was linked with the Indian empire and her administrative set up was mainly based on Indian pattern.

About six decades of British rule witnessed a number of remarkable political, economic, and social changes in Burma. The British applied a series of constitutional measures to the country. The Chief Commissioner was raised to the rank of

Lieutenant Governor in 1897 with a council of nine members. But real authority still lay in the hands of British officers. The expansion of the council in 1909 did not bring any major change in the administration of the country. The British made no real effort towards self-government in Burma before the twentieth century. Even in cultural and economic spheres, the British role never aimed at promoting a national culture or a national economy in Burma. Burmese nationalism remained silent for a pretty long time since the annexation of the country by the British. It was mainly because the British discouraged the growth of nationalism and the expansion of nationalist sentiments in Burma. Nationalism in Burma first manifested itself clearly in the cultural sphere in the early twentieth century with the birth of YMBA in 1906.

A number of important factors contributed to the emergence and growth of nationalism in Burma during British rule. Resentment against unfamiliar British administration, decline in national culture, a strong sense of nationalist feeling, distrust of foreign rule, the new education, world forces and Indian contact were some of the decisive elements responsible for the growth of nationalism in the country. But nationalism in Burma turned to be a powerful political force only after the First World War. However, the impact of Buddhist religion and the Indian national movement definitely aroused national awareness among the people of Burma even before the outbreak of the war.

The First World War had certain significant indirect effects on nationalist movement in Burma. It not only stimulated nationalist feelings but enlarged the political outlook of the Burmese people. The YMBA soon came to be associated with political activities in 1916-18 over the 'Footwear controversy' and some other religious issues. It resulted in mass protest and action in Burma giving a new dimension to the nationalist agitation. The denial of Montagu-Chelmsford reforms of 1919 to Burma generated strong nationalist feeling among the people. Two delegations, one after another, were immediately sent to London for pleading Burma's case. Nationalism in

Burma became well-organized and a popular movement in 1920's. A widespread national strike by students in 1920 was an important political development which actively associated the students with national politics.

The British ultimately applied the Montagu reforms to Burma in 1923 which marked a step forward towards responsible self-government in Burma. The dyarchical scheme continued in the country upto 1936 but it did not gain the support and favour in Burmese nationalists. An alarming political situation in Burma drew the attention of the British Government. The Simon Commission was appointed in 1928 which recommended separate constitutional reforms for Burma and her separation from India. The anti-Indian feeling in Burma resulted in the outburst of racial riots in 1930. The 'Tharrawaddy Rebellion' under Saya San against the British and other such incidents greatly stimulated nationalist feelings. The Dobama Asi-ayone, started in early 1930, and the Sinyetha Party, formed by Ba Maw in 1936, commonly aimed at independence of the country. The Government of Burma Act of 1935 brought about the separation of Burma from India. The Act provided for a new constitution and a real measure of self-government in Burma.

The appearance of the Thakins on the political scene of Burma constituted a milestone in the growth of nationalism as a potent political force in Burma. The Thakin movement exercised a powerful and decisive influence on the speedy growth of Burmese nationalism. The Thakins came to the limelight during the second student strike in 1936. The strike clearly reflected nationalist feelings and resentment against foreign rule. The Thakins had before them complete independence as their ultimate objective. They were even prepared to take recourse to violent means for realizing their aim. They were ready to receive help from anywhere with a view to achieve their desired goal of independence.

The outbreak of the Second World War in Europe in 1939 offered an opportunity to Burmese nationalists to up

forward their demands. Different political parties united to form a 'Freedom Bloc' in late 1939 under the leadership of Ba Maw. It demanded British recognition of Burma's right to independence, calling of a Constituent Assembly, and cabinet supervision over the authorities of the Governor. World War II strengthened the nationalist aspirations of the Thakins. The BRP symbolized the rising nationalism among the energetic Thakins and students who desired to do away with British imperialism. The British Government took repressive measures and put a number of Thakin leaders to jail. But it hardly served the purpose of the British.

Meanwhile, the Burmese nationalists made efforts early in the war to achieve their objectives through peaceful means by negotiating with the British. But it was of no avail. Now it was clear to the Burmese nationalists that their desire for independence could never be fulfilled under the British. An anti-British feeling grew intensely which united the Burmese nationalists as never before. Aung San was largely instrumental in shaping the policy of the Thakin Party. The 'Thirty comrades' under Aung San received military training at Hainan Island as planned by the Japanese. They soon formed part of the BIA and reentered Burma at the time of Japanese invasion of 1942.

As it has been discussed in chapter three that the Japanese conquest and occupation of Burma from 1942 to 1945 opened a new chapter in the history of Burma. Nationalism in Burma had already become conscious and vocal even prior to the Japanese conquest of the country. Japan was in complete occupation of Burma by the end of May 1942. The British rule abruptly came to an end and the British Burma Government shifted to Simla in India. This turn of event had a number of far-reaching consequences. Some of the Burmese people held Japan as liberator of Burma from western domination. Japan was also able to get the co-operation and assistance of most of the Burmese nationalists in the beginning.

Thakin Tun Oke was appointed as Chief Administrator of Burma and his Burma Baho Government functioned from April to early June 1942. But this arrangement proved to be a failure and Burma came under direct Japanese military administration. Soon afterwards, the 'Executive Administration' under Ba Maw was set up on 1 August, 1942. But it remained strictly under the control of the Japanese Military Administration. The Japanese Military Administration ended with the granting of independence to Burma by Japan on 1 August, 1943. Ba Maw became the Head of the State and his cabinet included many prominent nationalist leaders like Aung San, Thakins Mya, Than Tun, Nu, and Lay Maung. The new constitution of Burma was primarily fascist in character. However, the independence of Burma under Japan had psychological effects. The people of Burma felt that they had their own national Government, courts, and National Army. Their goal of independence seemed to be fulfilled.

But the real nature of Japanese rule soon became clear. It failed to gain the popular support of the people. The Thakins also shared the growing resentment of the Burmese people against the Japanese. They were even secretly engaged in making out plans for the end of the Japanese rule. The organization of the AFPFL in 1944 was largely through the efforts of dedicated nationalists like Aung San and Than Tun. Aung San made it clear on 1 August, 1944, that the independence of Burma was only in name. The real objective of independence was far away from reality. The attitudes of the nationalist leaders and the people of Burma towards Japan changed completely. The country suffered a lot under Japanese control. One important result of the Japanese occupation was that almost all political parties in Burma came to be united in the name of independence. A strong sense of nationalism developed in the country. Yet, it was a fact that many Burman leaders were able to gain first real governmental experience under the Japanese.

The independence of Burma was never the chief concern of the Japanese. Hence, Burmese nationalists turned against

Japan after having realized the fact that their independence was not possible under the Japanese control. The declining fortune of Japan in the war provided them an opportunity to achieve their objective of independence. The Japanese rule not only generated mass awakening in Burma but aroused the nationalist sentiments of the people. The people of Burma were now ready to make determined efforts for achieving independence at all costs. A majority of the Thakins gathered round Aung San in their struggle for freedom. Under the circumstances, a resistance movement against the Japanese was organized in Burma.

The Resistance Movement against Japan proved to be a unique and distinct phase of freedom struggle in Burma during the Second World War. Disillusionment with Japan soon developed and the nationalist leaders in Burma followed the course of resistance. The Resistance Movement in Burma took a popular and concrete shape by the middle of 1944. But it had its origin much earlier. A series of developments helped to strengthen the resistance in Burma. Aung San received active co-operation and support from different quarters in making resistance a success. A number of meetings were organized by the Thakins in which plans for the resistance against Japan were prepared. The Thakin leaders, especially Aung San and Than Tun, were able to gain the confidence of the Karens which proved to be of great value in the Resistance Movement.

The official Allied decision to co-operate with the Burmese Resistance was not made until Mountbatten took command in 1943. Aung San was on friendly terms with Mountbatten and Slim. Aung San and Than Tun played a key role in organizing the Burmese people in a common resistance against Japan. Aung San along with communist and socialist leaders formed the AFPFL in August 1944. This nationalist organization under the leadership of Aung San played a decisive role in the Resistance Movement against Japan. The BNA under Aung San also actively co-operated with the resistance. Aung San succeeded in getting the support

of the British military authorities by the end of 1944. A turning-point in the Resistance Movement came in March 1945 when Aung San and the BNA parted company with the Japanese and joined hands with the Allies. It was a rare occasion in the history of Burma when entire nation and the people were united to resist the Japanese. 27 March is considered as the 'Resistance Day' in Burma because an open general uprising led by Aung San against the Japanese forces occurred on this day. Aung San and the BNA openly marched to fight the Japanese and the resistance spread throughout the country. They co-operated with the Allied Forces in driving the Japanese out of Burma. With the British re-occupation of Rangoon on 5 May, 1945, the resistance against the Japanese came to an end. Aung San came out as the main leader of the Resistance Movement. The AFPFL emerged as the foremost political organization with mass support behind it. Thus the Resistance Movement in Burma partly contributed towards the defeat of the Japanese. Its help to the British in driving the Japanese out of Burma enhanced its prestige and standing.

With the British reoccupation of Burma, a new phase of British-Burmese relations commenced. The post-war period in Burma was full of hectic political activities. It led to the growth of impatient nationalism. Complete independence for Burma was now the main concern of the nationalist leaders. After initial goodwill and cooperation between the AFPFL and British Military Administration, there followed a period of wide disagreement between the British and the Burmese nationalists from October 1945 to August 1946.

After the end of the war, Burmese nationalism was poised for a direct confrontation with the British Government, if demand for independence was not conceded in a short time. Aung San and the AFPFL put forward their claim for recognition. The support of Mountbatten had clearly strengthened the position of the AFPFL. The British 'White Paper' policy of May 1945 was not acceptable to the AFPFL. It failed to meet the progressive demands of the Burmese nationalists. However, during the period of military administration in

Burma from June to October 1945, cordial relations existed between the AFPFL and the British mainly due to Mountbatten's sympathy and support to the AFPFL.

The restoration of civil government in Burma under Governor Dorman-Smith in October 1945 led to hostility and mutual distrust between the AFPFL and the British. Dorman-Smith's initial efforts to win the favour of Aung San and the AFPFL proved futile. Relations between them considerably deteriorated during the coming months. The Governor did not agree to the terms of Aung San and other nationalist leaders over the formation of the Executive Council. This factor intensified the struggle of the AFPFL against the British. The Governor set up an Executive Council without any representative of the League. Dorman-Smith was determined not to recognize the AFPFL as the representative of the whole country. The first nationwide rally of the AFPFL was held in January 1946. It clearly demonstrated the overwhelming position of the League under Aung San. The PVO was solidly behind them. The Governor's attempts to build a rival nationalist faction against the League met with failure. A move to arrest Aung San was soon countermanded. But it generated a strong public protest in the country and enhanced the reputation of Aung San as a great nationalist leader. The British Government could no longer overlook the strength and great popularity of Aung San and the AFPFL.

The British Labour Government under Prime Minister Attlee was in favour of a new policy towards Burma. Dorman-Smith submitted his resignation on 4 August, 1946 and a new Governor, Sir Hubert Rance, was appointed in his place. But the AFPFL continued its struggle for independence. A number of mass demonstrations were organized. The new Governor took office on 1 September, 1946. Immediately after his arrival, the Governor was confronted with a general strike in Burma. But he wisely acted to enlist the support and co-operation of Aung San and the AFPFL. Thus with new outlook and policy of the new Governor the phase of conflict and confrontation

between the British and the Burmans ended and conciliation and co-operation between them began.

The last crucial phase of the freedom struggle in Burma began from September 1946 in an atmosphere of mutual understanding between the British and the Burmese nationalists. The AFPFL, recognized by the British, became the most powerful and dominant political organization representing the people of Burma. The new Executive Council formed by Governor Rance was dominated by the AFPFL. It remained in power till actual independence was gained. The Executive Council under Aung San demanded, among other things, complete independence within one year of the date of proclamation which was to be made before 31 January, 1947. The British Government accepted the demands without any hesitation. Subsequently, the famous "Aung San-Attlee Agreement" was signed in London on 27 January, 1947. It started a new chapter of British-Burmese friendship and co-operation. Some important conclusions were arrived at regarding the process through which Burma could achieve her independence in shortest possible time. Soon after the ratification of the "Aung San-Attlee Agreement" by the Executive Council and by the AFPFL working committee, Aung San and his close associates made sincere efforts to enlist the support of the peoples of the frontier areas with the Interim Government and the proposed Constituent Assembly. An important agreement was signed at Panglong on 12 February 1947 regarding the principles of participation of the peoples of the frontier areas with the Interim Government. A month later, the Frontier Areas Committee of Enquiry made recommendations in favour of frontier areas people's participation in the Constituent Assembly.

The AFPFL secured an absolute majority in the April elections of the Constituent Assembly. The League was now in a position to lead the country towards the goal of independence. Aung San and Mya were two most important leaders of Burma who fully engaged themselves with preparations for

independence. The AFPFL convention of May 1947 laid down the policy of Burma's independence and prepared the draft of the new constitution for the country. The June sessions of the Constituent Assembly under the presidency of Thakin Nu adopted a number of significant resolutions. The tragic assassination of Aung San and some of his close associates in July was a fatal blow to the country. Thakin Nu was now entrusted with the task of finishing the work of Aung San. He became the Prime Minister of the Provisional Government of Burma and virtually assumed the leadership of the country in the absence of Aung San. The Constituent Assembly, adopted the constitution for the Union of Burma on 24 Sept. 1947. The signing of the 'Nu-Attlee Agreement' on 17 Oct., 1947 almost completed the process of independence. The British Parliament finally passed the Burma Independence Act in December whereby Burma became an independent sovereign republic outside the British Commonwealth of Nations. The Union of Burma formally came into existence on 4 January, 1948. The long struggle for freedom came to a glorious finish with the accomplishment of Burmese independence.

There were some important political leaders in Burma who played a decisive role in the freedom struggle of the country. Aung San rightly occupies a distinctive place among these nationalist leaders. He was a man of great integrity and remarkable courage. His dedication to the cause of Burma was a matter to be proud of. He never lost his vision even in most critical moments. He was neither pro-Japanese nor pro-British. The independence of Burma was his only objective and he always shaped his policies and programmes with this end in view. Aung San was indeed the most popular and acknowledged leader of the Burmese masses. He played a pivotal role in the freedom struggle of the country. It was under his leadership that the Thakins emerged as the dominant political group in Burma. He was also the leader of the 'Thirty comrades' during the initial stage of the freedom movement in the course of Second World War. When Aung San lost his faith in the Japanese, he organised the Resistance Movement against Japan and soon became the nucleus of it. Aung

San successfully guided the destiny of Burma in post-war period too. He openly challenged the British when demand for independence was not conceded. But he was never rigid in his stand and started negotiating with the British for realizing his goal of freedom. This great patriot served the country till the last moment of his life. He is genuinely regarded as the Father of the Nation.

Other important nationalist leaders who influenced the freedom struggle during war and post-war years were Thakin Nu, Than Tun, Mya, Tin Tut etc. As discussed earlier, these leaders contributed to the freedom struggle of the country in one way or the other. After the tragic end of Aung San, Thakin Nu came to the forefront and provided leadership to the country till the gaining of the independence. He also became the first Prime Minister of independent Burma. There were several other leaders too who associated themselves with the independence movement.

The role of the AFPFL, the leading political organization, was still more significant in the freedom struggle of Burma in closing years of the war and post-war years. It was the only political organization in the country which dominated the scene in the post-war period. The League also took a leading part in the Resistance Movement against Japan. It was very popular throughout the country. The AFPFL was the most formidable voice in Burmese politics after the Second World War. It represented the entire country and decided the policies for the independence. No other political party in Burma could stand in comparison with the League. Like its Indian counterpart the Indian National Congress the AFPFL was primarily responsible for successfully negotiating with the British for transfer of power in Burma. The League actively associated itself with the freedom struggle of Burma till independence was ultimately achieved and it emerged as the political organization capable of leading the country and the people after independence.

There were certain important circumstances and factors which helped to the success of the freedom struggle. The Second World War proved to be a turning point and decisively influenced the course of the freedom movement in Burma. It gave a new orientation to the goal of independence of the nationalist leaders in Burma. The liberal attitude of the British Labour Government under Attlee paved the way of the freedom struggle and facilitated a smooth transfer of power to Burma. The conciliatory and friendly attitudes of Mountbatten and the last Governor of Burma, Hubert Rance, proved to be of great help to the nationalist leaders of the country. The British policy towards post-war Indian national movement also exercised some influence on the freedom struggle of Burma. All these factors helped to the gaining of independence in Burma.

The freedom struggle in Burma thus derived help and inspiration from various directions. It was really very difficult for Britain during post-war years to keep a freedom-loving country under subjection for a long time. — It can be concluded at the end that Burma's experience during the Second World War and Japanese occupation, and her determined moves in post-war years and liberal attitude of the British Labour Government under Attlee—all contributed towards gaining of Burma's independence. Britain could no longer ignore the rising tide of Burmese nationalism. She bowed to the reality and Burma became an independent sovereign republic on 4 January, 1948. The independence opened a new chapter in the history of post-war Burma.

APPENDICES

Appendix I

Thirty Comrades

<i>Name</i>	<i>Assumed Name and war time position</i>	<i>Japanese Name</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>
Aung San	Bo Te Za, Commander in Chief and War Minister	Omoda Monji
Tun Ok	A Chief Administrator, later confined in Singapore	Ishihara
Hla Pe	Bo Let Ya, Chief of Military Affairs, War Office	Tani Kiyoshi
Shu Maung	Bo Ne Win, Commander in Chief, BNA	Takasugi Susumn
Aung Than	Bo Set Kya, Vice War Minister, attache in Tokyo	Hirata Masao
Hla Maung	Bo Ze Ya, Principal of Military Academy	Kaga Tadashi

1	2	3
Tun Shein	Bo Yan Naing, ADC to Dr. Ba Maw	Yamashita Terno
Shwe	Bo Kyaw Zaw, Principal of NCO's School	Taniguchi Shinichi
Hla Myaing	Bo Yan Aung, Chief of Staff	Itoda Sadai Chi
San Hlaing	Bo Aung (Bohmu Aung) attached to Training School	Omura Tadashi
Ba Gyan	Bo Za Yauog. Assistant to ADC to Dr. Ba Maw	Baba Takcshi
Tio Aye	Bo Phon Myint, attached to NCO's School	Chinda
Tun Khin	Bo Myiot Swe, Educational Troops	Nkakmura Hirosbi
Khin Maung U	Bo Ta Ya, Educational School	Monya Masaru
Tun Lwin	Bo Ba La, Educational Troops	Obtani Hiroi Chi
Aung Thein	Bo Ye Htut, Battalion Commander	Hayashi
Kyaw Sein	Bo Mo Nyo, Chief of Engineering Troops	Takahashi
Saw Lwin	Bo Min Gaung, Secretary to War Minister	Yamaoka
Sao Mya	Bo Tauk Htain, attached to NCO's School	Nakagawa Ichiro
Than Nyunt	Bo Zin Yaw, Engineering Troops	Ohkawa
Thit Hla	Bo Saw Naung Bo Min Yaung	Ohsawa Ito

1	2	3
Tun Shwe	Bo Lin Yon, attached to Educational Troops	Utsumi Susumu
Soe	Bo Myint Aung, Battalion Commander of AA Troops (died in Nattalin)	Khono
Saung	Bo Htein Win, attached to Propaganda Department (died in Thailand)	Monya Hitoshi
Ngwe	Bo Saw Aung (killed in action in Shwegin)	Katsura
Aye Maung	Bo (killed in action at Phugyi)	Mizuno Saburo
Maung Maung	Bo Nyana (killed in action at Berlin, Thaton District)	Tsuchiya
Than Tin	Bo Mya Din (died at Chiangmai, Thailand)	Osan
Than Tin	Bo Than Tin (died on Formosa)	Yamada

Appendix II

The Aung San-Attlee Agreement, 27 January, 1947; Conclusions Reached in the Conversations Between His Majesty's Government and the Delegation from the Executive Council of the Governor of Burma

His Majesty's Government and the Delegation of the Burma Executive Council having discussed all the matters affecting the future relations between Great Britain and Burma which were raised by the Delegation have reached the following agreed conclusions as to the methods by which the people of Burma may achieve their independence, either within or without the Commonwealth as soon as possible:

1. *The Constituent Assembly*: In order that the people of Burma may decide on the future constitution of their country as soon as possible a Constituent Assembly shall be elected instead of a Legislature under the Act of 1935. For this purpose the electoral machinery of the 1935 Act will be used. The election will take place in April for General Non-communal, the Karen and Anglo-Burman Constituencies as constituted under the Act of 1935 and for each Constituency two members shall be returned. Any Burma nationals (as defined in Annex A) registered in a General Constituency other than one of those mentioned above shall be placed on the register of a General Non-Communal Constituency.

2. *Transitional Form of Government*: During the period of transition the Government of Burma will be carried on as at

present under the special powers of section 139 of the Act of 1935 and Temporary Provisions Ect of 1935 together with any orders in Council made thereunder. If any exceptional circumstances arise which in the opinion of either Government require special treatment H.M.G. will consider what, if any, alteration can be made to meet such circumstances.

3. *Interim Legislature*: During the interim period there will be a Legislative Council as provided by the Act of 1935. Power will be sought by H.M.G. by order in Council to increase the numbers authorised from 50 to 100. As soon as the elections to the Constituent Assembly are completed the Governor will nominate a Legislative Council of 100. It will be drawn from amongst those elected to the Constituent Assembly with the inclusion of a small number of persons to represent the non-indigenous minorities. The powers of the Legislative Council will be identical with those possessed by those recently dissolved Legislative Council of 50.

4. *Interim Government* : The Executive Council of the Governor will constitute the Interim Government of Burma. While it is not possible to alter the legal powers of the Executive Council or of the Governor which must continue within the frame-work set out in paragraph 2 above the Interim Government will be conducted generally in the same manner as the Interim Government of India at the present time and in particular:

- (a) The Executive Council will be treated with the same close consultation and consideration as a Dominion Government and will have the greatest possible freedom in the exercise of the day-to-day administration of the country. The convention exercised during the currency of the Act of 1935 as to the Governor presiding at the meetings of the Council of Ministers shall be continued in relation to the Executive Council.

- (b) His Majesty's Government agree in principle that the Government of Burma shall have financial autonomy....
- (c) Matters concerning Defence and External Affairs will be brought before the Executive Council, which will be fully associated with the disposal of business in such matters.
- (d) The Governor will depute to his Counsellor for Defence and External Affairs the day-to-day administration of those subjects. Subject only to the limitations inherent in the legal position, the Executive Council will be at full liberty to raise, consider, discuss and decide on any matters arising in the field of policy and administration.

5. *External Affairs* : There shall be appointed forthwith a High Commissioner for Burma to represent the Burmese Government in London. His Majesty's Government will request the Governments of countries with which Burma wishes to exchange diplomatic representatives to agree to such an exchange.

6. *Membership of International Organizations* : His Majesty's Government will lend their full support to any application by Burma for the membership of the U.N.O. as soon as Burma's constitutional position makes it possible for such an application to be entertained. In the meantime His Majesty's Government will explore with the Secretary-General how far it is possible for Burma to be represented at any meetings, or under the auspices of the U.N.O. They will also approach any other International bodies which the Government of Burma may desire with a view to ascertaining whether Burma can be associated with the work of such bodies as a member nation or otherwise.

7. *Defence* : (a) In accordance with settled practice all British Forces stationed in Burma will remain under the ultimate control of His Majesty's Government.

- (b) All Burmese Forces will forthwith come under the control of the Government of Burma.
- (c) His Majesty's Government have agreed in principle that the G.O.C. in Burma shall become subordinate to the Governor and the Government of Burma at the earliest practicable moment, but for the present, until liquidation of Inter-Allied arrangements of Command which cover many countries, the G.O.C. in Burma will remain under S.E.A.L.F. During this period there will of course be close collaboration between the Government of Burma and authorities concerned....
- (d) The question of assistance in building up the Defence Forces of Burma will be a matter for discussion between the two Governments. His Majesty's Government wish to do their utmost to help the Government of Burma in this matter but must have regard to their already heavy commitments in other parts of the world.
- (e) The question of the retention or use of any British Forces in Burma after the coming into operation of the new constitution will be a matter for agreement between His Majesty's Government and the Government of Burma.

8. *Frontier Areas* : It is the agreed objective of both His Majesty's Government and the Burmese Delegates to achieve the early unification of the Frontier Areas and Ministerial Burma with the free consent of the inhabitants of those areas. In the meantime it is agreed that the people of the Frontier Areas should in respect of subjects of common interest be closely associated with the Government of Burma in a manner acceptable to both parties. For these purposes it has been agreed:

- (a) There shall be free intercourse between the peoples of the Frontier Areas and the people of Ministerial Burma without hindrance.

- (b) The leaders and representatives of the peoples of the Frontier Areas shall be asked either at the Panglong Conference to be held at the beginning of next month or a special conference to be convened for the purpose to express their views upon the form of association with the Government of Burma which they consider acceptable during the transition period: whether (i) by appointment of a small group of Frontier representatives to advise the Governor on Frontier Affairs and to have close liaison with the Executive Council, or (ii) by appointment of one Frontier Area representative as Executive Counsellor in charge of Frontier Affairs, or (iii) by some other method.
- (c) After the Panglong meeting or special conference His Majesty's Government and the Government of Burma will agree upon the best method of advancing their common aims in accordance with the expressed views of the peoples of the Frontier Areas.
- (d) A Committee of Enquiry shall be set up forthwith as to the best method of associating the frontier peoples with the working out of the new constitution for Burma. Such committee will consist of equal numbers of persons from Ministerial Burma nominated by the Executive Council and of persons from the Frontier Areas nominated by the Governor after consultation with leaders of those areas with a neutral Chairman from outside Burma selected by agreement. Such committee shall be asked to report to the Government of Burma and His Majesty's Government before summoning of the Constituent Assembly.

9. *Finance*: A number of financial questions have been considered and an agreement has been arrived as to how these matters should be dealt with....

10. *Other matters*: A number of other questions will arise for settlement between His Majesty's Government and

the Government of Burma connected with the change in the status of Burma. These will be taken up as they arise and will be dealt with in the same friendly and cooperative spirit that has marked the present discussions. Both His Majesty's Government and the delegates of the Burma Executive Council are convinced that by a continuation of the present method of consultation and cooperation smooth and rapid progress can be made towards their common objective of a free and independent Burma, whether within or without the British Commonwealth of Nations, and they have therefore agreed to cooperate in the settlement of all future matters which shall arise between them through the transitional period until Burma's new constitution comes into operation.

C.R. ATTLEE
10, Downing Street, S.W. 1,
27 January, 1947.

AUNG SAN

Appendix III

The Panglong Agreement, 12 February, 1947

A conference having been held at Panglong, attended by certain Members of the Executive Council of the Governor of Burma, all Saophas and representatives of the Shan States, the Knehin Hills and the Chin Hills: The Members of the conference, believing that freedom will be more speedily achieved by the Shans, the Kachins and the Chins by their immediate cooperation with the Interim Burmese Government. The Members of the conference have accordingly, and without dissentients, agreed as follows:

1. A representative of the Hill peoples, selected by the Governor on the recommendation of representatives of the Supreme Council of the United Hill Peoples (SCOUHP), shall be appointed a Counsellor to the Governor to deal with the Frontier Areas.
2. The said Counsellor shall also be appointed a Member of the Governor's Executive Council, without portfolio, and the subject of Frontier Areas brought within the purview of the Executive Council by Constitutional Convention as in the case of Defence and External Affairs. The Counsellor for Frontier Areas shall be given executive authority by similar means.

3. The said Counsellor shall be assisted by two Deputy Counsellors representing races of which he is not a member. While the two Deputy Counsellors should deal in the first instance with the affairs of their respective areas and the Counsellor with all the remaining parts of the Frontier Areas, they should by Constitutional Convention act on the principle of joint responsibility.
4. While the Counsellor, in his capacity of Member of the Executive Council, will be the only representative of the Frontier Areas on the Council, the Deputy Counsellors shall be entitled to attend meetings of the Council when subjects pertaining to the Frontier Areas are discussed.
5. Though the Governor's Executive Council will be augmented as agreed above, it will not operate in respect of the Frontier Areas in any manner which would deprive any portion of these areas of the autonomy which it now enjoys in internal administration. Full autonomy in internal administration for the Frontier Areas is accepted in principle.
6. Though the question of demarcating and establishing a separate Kachin State within a Unified Burma is *one which must be relegated for decision* by the Constituent Assembly, it is agreed that such a State is desirable. As a first step towards this end, the Counsellor for Frontier Areas and the Deputy Counsellors shall be consulted in the administration of such areas in the Myitkyina and the Bhamo Districts as are part II Scheduled Areas under the Government of Burma Act of 1935.
7. Citizens of the Frontier Areas shall enjoy rights and privileges which are regarded as fundamental in democratic countries.

8. The arrangements accepted in this Agreement are without prejudice to the financial autonomy now vested in the Federated Shan States.
9. The arrangements accepted in this Agreement are without prejudice to the financial assistance which the Kachin Hills and the Chin Hills are entitled to receive from the revenues of Burma, and the Executive Council will examine with the Frontier Areas Counsellor and Deputy Counsellors the feasibility of adopting for the Kachin Hills and the Chin Hills financial arrangements similar to those between Burma and the Federated Shan States.

Appendix IV

Attlee Papers

17 October, 1947. The text of the speech which the Prime Minister of England proposes to make on the occasion of the signature of the Treaty this morning

I do not want to make a long speech today. But this is an historic occasion, and it would not be proper that it should pass without some word from me. To-day the Prime Minister of Burma and I are signing a Treaty to regulate the matters arising out of the transfer of power from Great Britain to Burma, proposals for which we are about to submit to Parliament. The Treaty has been freely negotiated between our two Governments as between equals. It records the full agreement that we have reached on the matters which it covers. It will be the basis of our future relations. This is, I believe, a unique occasion. For the Treaty is being signed in anticipation of a transfer of sovereignty which has not resulted from the exercise or the threat of forces. It is a voluntary transfer, subject, as the free negotiation of this Treaty shows, to no conditions. It will take place in circumstances of the greatest amity and mutual understanding. The Constituent Assembly, representing the people of Burma, have decided that Burma's future as an independent country should lie outside the British Commonwealth. We are sorry to think that our long association with Burma as a member of the Commonwealth should now be ending. But this is a matter which is for the decision of the

people of Burma. We accept their decision. We know that it is taken in no spirit of hostility or unfriendliness. We are glad, indeed, to think that the conclusion of the Treaty which is being signed this morning shows that the bonds of friendship between our two countries are as strong as ever. We are confident that with the passage of time, mutual respect and community of interest will ensure the continuance of the cordial friendship and good understanding which so happily mark relations between us to-day. In the handling of the great tasks that lie before them, the Government of Burma, under their distinguished leader whom we are so glad to have with us this morning, and the people of Burma, will go forward with the sincere good wishes of the Government and the people of this country for their advancement, prosperity, and happiness as an independent State.

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